

Gospel Light

COMMENTS FROM THE ARAMAIC AND UNCHANGED EASTERN CUSTOMS ON THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS

Many mysteries solved. Flashes of light upon miracles and wonders with new understanding of their purpose obtained by the correct interpretation of the words as they were used in the contemporary manner of the times.



GEORGE M. LAMSA

REV. ABRAHAM M. RIHBANY, D.D.

"The recent translation of the Four Gospels from the Aramaic Version by George M. Lamsa has cleared up many statements which it was difficult to reconcile with Jesus' teaching."



This symbol scribes used to indicate that the manuscript was a sacred one. It was only used at the beginning. All sacred writings were preceded by this symbol.

THE LITERARY DIGEST:

"Mr. Lamsa's translation shows many marked differences in meaning between the Aramaic version and the Greek translation, due to the inability of the Greek translators to express in their own tongue Aramaic colloquialisms and shades in meaning. It has already occasioned deep interest in seminaries and among clergy, many of whom are said to hail it as enabling them to gain an insight into the teachings of Jesus which they found difficult in the King James version."



This is the symbol for Amen.

CHRISTIAN HERALD:

"Dr. Lamsa is entirely orthodox—there is no offensive higher criticism in his book. You will find this translation tremendously interesting and valuable."



This ornament we have used at the end of each comment is the symbol used by ancient scribes to designate the end of subjects in their manuscripts.

PUBLISHER'S STATEMENT

In publishing this book we feel the author has helped in a large and sympathetic manner to a greater understanding and easier reading of the Gospels.

BOSTON EVENING TRANSCRIPT:

"This translation apparently has many suggestive emendations which do throw light on the actual significance of the words of Jesus."

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR:

"Many of Mr. Lamsa's renditions are of special interest to Bible students. The book should stand on its own merits. That it will cause much discussion is already apparent; that it will find many ardent supporters is equally certain." Albert F. Gilmore.

NEW YORK TIMES:

"According to striking evidence adduced by George M. Lamsa in his recent English translation of the Scriptures from the ancient Peshitta Text, a number of passages which are obscure in what the west regards as the original Greek become perfectly clear when referred back to the Peshitta Text."

THE AMERICAN WEEKLY:

"Jesus never said it was as difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven as for a camel to pass through a needle's eye," says Dr. Lamsa. "He said, 'for a rope to pass through a needle's eye.' The Aramaic word for rope is the same as the word for camel—it is 'gamla.' How can that be? Well, why should the English word 'board' mean a plank and also something to eat? And why should 'fire' mean something burning and also to discharge a gun—or an employe? The answer is obvious—idiomatic words. And because the early Greek translators did not understand Aramaic idioms, they produced a Bible far different from our Nestorian Bible, which is in the original Aramaic, or Syriac, and has been handed down in manuscript—never printed—since the earliest days of Christianity."

CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOR WORLD:

"This translation from the Aramaic Eastern Version is a distinctive contribution. It presents the Saviour with His constraining charm. Many quotations show new light on passages as compared with the King James Version."

THE KINGS ENGLISH, Berlin:

"This may well be termed an epoch-making book, for it is the first translation into English direct out of the language spoken by Jesus."

Editorial Endorsements on

MORE GOSPEL LIGHT

A New Testament Commentary of Subjects

Additional to Those in

GOSPEL LIGHT

MOODY MONTHLY

This is the concluding volume of a commentary by this Assyrian scholar, which began with the four Gospels. The Aramaic often sheds light on otherwise obscure passages in the English. However, some of the translator's theological comments have to be read with caution.

THE BAPTIST RECORD

"A New Testament Commentary" comments on New Testament subjects and ancient eastern customs giving new understanding of the words and idioms as they were used by Jesus and His apostles and contemporaries. This is the best one-volume commentary that we have seen. It does not cover every verse but even if you disagree with some of the conclusions, they are interesting. The author is Dr. George M. Lamsa, ethnologist and Aramaic language expert. Being a native Assyrian and reared in the Holy Land, Dr. Lamsa is well prepared.

RELIGIOUS TELESCOPE

The author of this book is a native of Assyria, and is among the foremost scholars of the world in the knowledge of the Aramaic languages which were spoken in the time of Christ and by use of which he takes his readers in a very realistic way back to the days of Christ and the apostles. Hence his translations and interpretations are of peculiar interest to scholars of today. However, his commentary on the New Testament is not only of interest to scholars, but is written in plain, non-technical terms that the casual reader will understand and appreciate. It is a book for the laity and the ministry alike. The chapters are brief and untranslated foreign terms are used very sparingly. It is not the book for a "cult" or a class, but for all seekers after truth. Many ambiguous and obscure passages are made plain, for the book seems to spring out of the soil which was trod by the Master Teacher and the New Testament writers.

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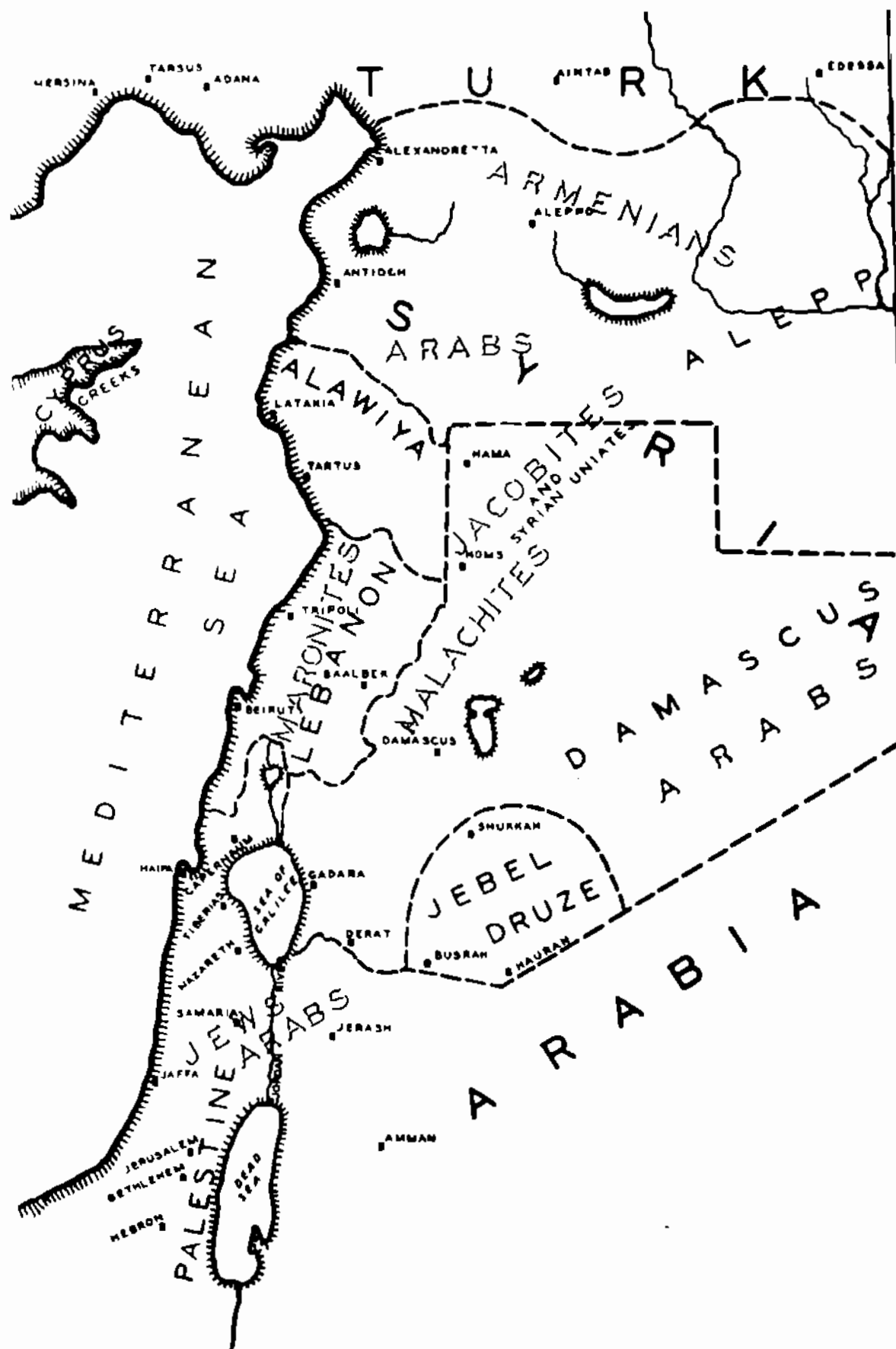
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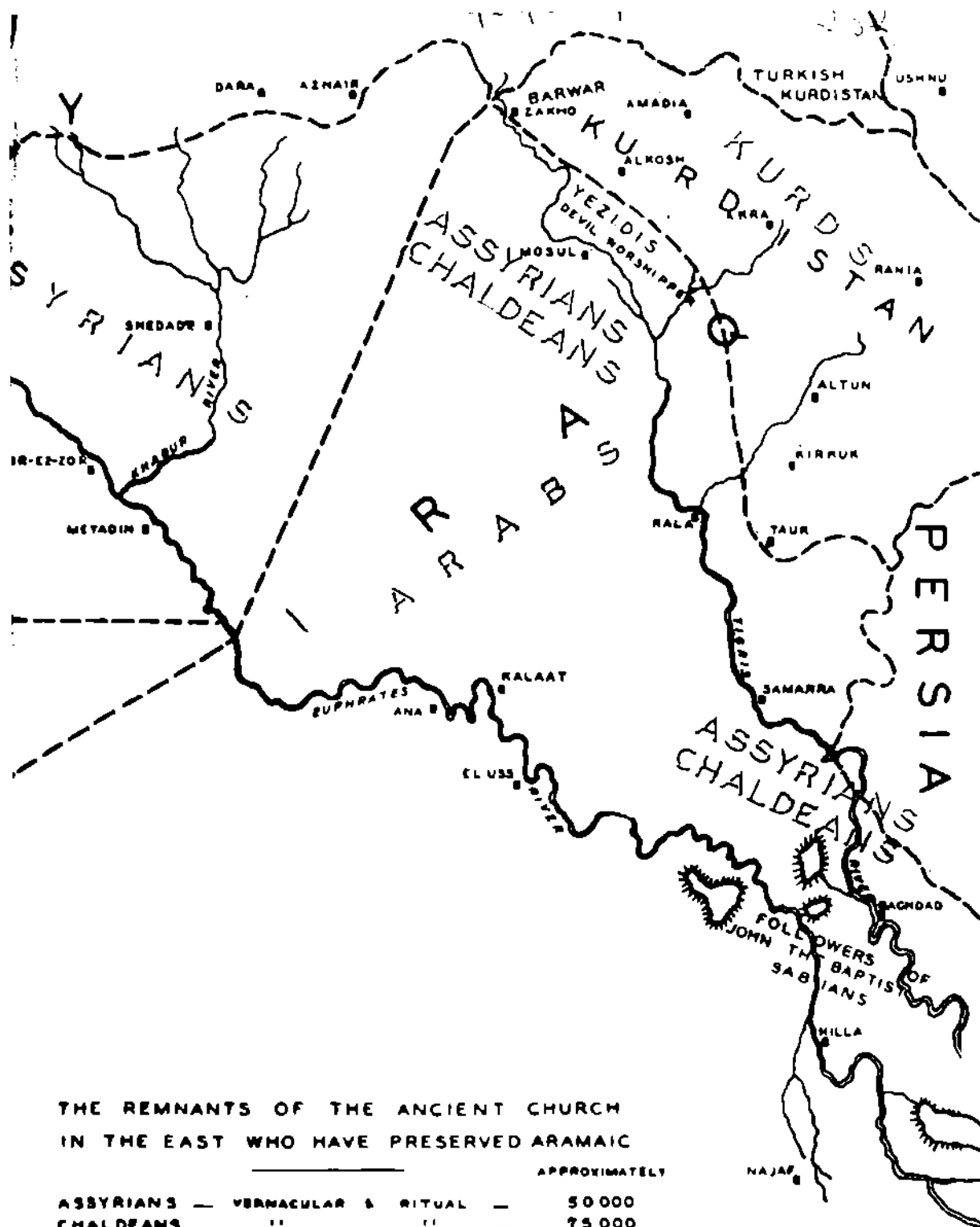
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OUR FATHER in heaven. Hal-
lowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Let thy
will be done, as in heaven so on earth.
Give us bread for our needs from day
to day.

And forgive us our offences, as we have
forgiven our offenders;

And do not let us enter into temptation,
but deliver us from error. Because
thine is the kingdom and the power and
the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

MATT. 6:9-13



LORD'S PRAYER IN ARAMAIC THE LANGUAGE WHICH JESUS SPOKE

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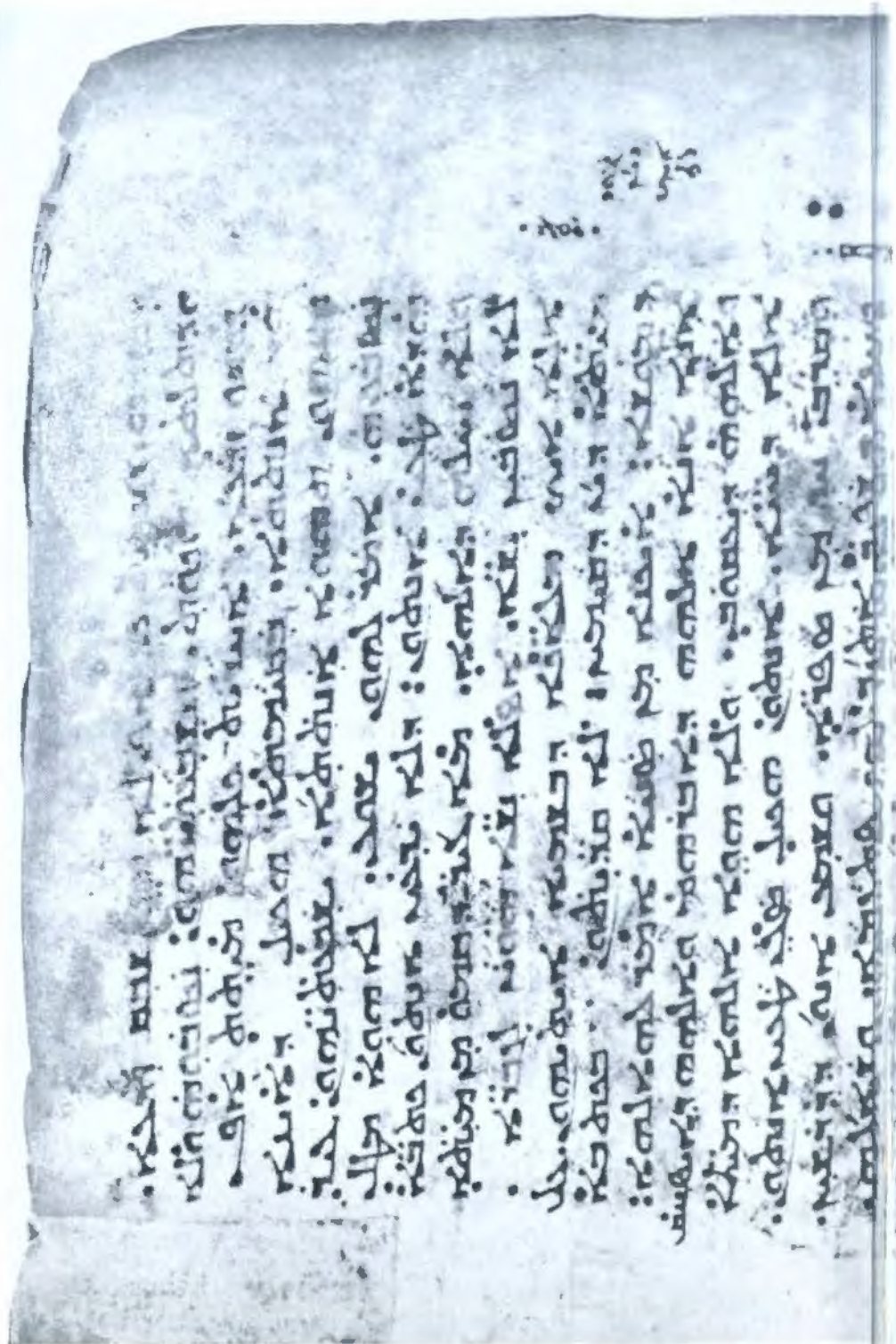
THE ARAMAIC TEXT IS IN THE AUTHOR'S HANDWRITING



AVON dvashmaya nithkadash shmakh:
taty malcothakh: nehwey seviranakh
aicanna dvashmaya op barah. Havlan
lakhma dsonkanan yomana: washboklan
khoben: aicanna dop khnan shbakn lkha-
yaven. Oola talan lnisuna ella passan min
bisha: mittol ddilakhye malcotha okhela
ootishbokhta: lalam almin: Amen.



Fac-simile of one of the few surviving Aramaic texts of the New Testament with exception of the Book of Revelation and a few Epistles. It was found in the ruins of an ancient Assyrian Church, in Persian Kurdistan. Since the publication of Lamsa's translation of the Four Gospels from Aramaic, these manuscripts have increased greatly in value.



Showing Portion of Page of Newly Discovered
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OF JESUS

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EASTERN CUSTOMS

By
GEORGE M. LAMSA, B. A.
Ethnologist
Aramaic Language Expert



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Bible Publishers
PHILADELPHIA

Revised Edition

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Fourth Printing

As a token of appreciation for their
generous interest in furthering my
Aramaic work I dedicate this book to
Mr. and Mrs. Samuel G. Thomson

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FOREWORD

This volume is the result of many questions asked by men and women who have attended my lectures on Aramaic. Letters of inquiry have also come from ministers and laymen of many Christian denominations and other faiths who have read my translation of the *Four Gospels* from Aramaic and other books on this subject. Many of these people expressed the desire to have, in writing, my interpretation of the passages which I had explained in my lectures and to have explained also other obscure and important passages in the Gospel narrative from my knowledge of the Aramaic language and ancient Semitic customs. These constitute the background of the Old and New Testament and the teachings of Jesus. Many lovers of the Bible who value truth more than pride and sectarian dogmas are ready to welcome any light thrown on the teachings of our Lord and any suggestion which makes them clearer.

In this work I am discussing difficult and important passages and not touching on those which are clear and simple. I am neither trying to discuss theological questions nor attempting to describe distances, localities or dates. This has already been done by others who have made a thorough study of these subjects.

In my introduction of the *Four Gospels* I did not try to quote other authorities on that subject. The reason for this was not that I was unaware of the enormous material written on this subject but because what I said concerning the Aramaic language and the eastern version of the Gospels was based on the history of the oldest Christian Church. These historic facts are the testimonies and writings of the eastern fathers and other writers from the earliest centuries to the present day. What is a fact needs no defense. Eastern and western scholars agree Aramaic was the language of our Lord and his disciples

and the scriptures were written in Aramaic. Furthermore, the antiquity and originality of the eastern version is always defended by the eastern Christians of all denominations. So far not the slightest evidence contrary to this assumption has been discovered.

I pray God this work will prove helpful to all lovers of the teachings of our beloved Lord and Master.

GEORGE M. LAMSA.

FOREWORD

By John Peabody Harrington, D.Sc.

Ethnologist

Smithsonian Institution, Washington

Miracle of miracles to me is the survival of the language of Christ through all the vicissitudes of the centuries even down to our own time, as a vernacular and literary tongue, and the power of a native reared to speak this tongue to interpret the gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, and the other writings of the New Testament with floods of newer and truer light. It is indeed as if this language were a precious bit of amber which has embedded in it and thus preserved throughout the ages some bit of prehistoric life which otherwise would not be known. Hidden away in the mountains of Kurdistan and Mesopotamia this tongue, almost exactly in the form spoken by the Master two thousand years ago, has escaped by miracle indeed being trampled under foot by conquering armies of Greeks, Persians, Romans, and Turks, to carry with it and have embedded in it, like the specimen embalmed in ancient amber, the life and thought and customs unaltered of people who lived in the time of Christ and in that period before his life which laid the foundation for the Jewish and Christian faiths.

Lamsa's claims that customs, manners and languages in his country have not changed since the time of Jesus are strongly supported by recent facts brought to light in Ethiopia. Ancient tribes with their unchanged customs and languages are just brought before the attention of western scholars. The unbroken dynastic descent of Emperor Haile Selassie I of Ethiopia may seem unbelievable to westerners, but it is a fact and unbroken tradition to the people of Ethiopia. This is because of isolation. It is true that our civilization is changing every day, but Ethi-

opians and Assyrians have been for centuries isolated in their mountain fastnesses cut off from the rest of the world; then again, what to us looks "old," to them is sacred and valuable, their very life is based on their ancestry and their ancient customs and traditions which they tenaciously wish to carry on to future generations.

No foreigner to Mr. Lamsa's Assyrian nationality, however learned or studious, even if he spent his life among the mountaineers, could do the present task of interpreting the New Testament to the western world with quite the fidelity and background that comes from one raised on an Assyrian mother's knee. Speaking both the Christian and the Jewish dialects of modern Assyrian of the region, he knows the language of Christ even as the apostles knew it and has the feeling for nicety of expression which is lost or which has been overlooked in many of the passages of the Greek translation which has hitherto been the means of communication between the words and times of Christ and our western civilization. This has indeed been a task to tax all the knowledge and linguistic knack of this comparatively young Assyrian who has consecrated his life to this service for mankind.

It will be noted in the following pages that Mr. Lamsa has touched only on the passages that have not been fully understood. To many of these he has given new life—a brilliant interpretation taken from the standpoint of his own oriental life. Words have survived, every word a bundle of meanings which combine with the meanings of other words to form a fabric as delicate as that of an oriental rug and as impossible for western factory-made learning or machinery to imitate. The survival of the personal mechanism to feel for and interpret is in itself as great a miracle as that of the survival of the language.

It has been a popular fallacy that the so-called modern dialects of Assyrian, which is but another name of Aramaic, have become bastardized, and that it is impossible for any language to maintain itself without the most fundamental changes during a period of two thousand years. Let whoever wishes to believe this do so. When we actually take the Aramaic words recorded in the New

Testament and compare them with the modern, we are astounded to find them unchanged. In fact, Mr. Lamsa makes an interesting point that any literary language, such as that in which the old Assyrian gospels are written, is of necessity more or less artificial and flowery, so that the modern language such as Mr. Lamsa himself talks is more like the daily speech of Christ and his disciples than like any embellished literary form of the language. The colloquial then and now is the sea, the literary is the surface agitation and foam.

Even to those interested principally in Judaism, Lamsa's writings, as those of a speaker of a pure Semitic language, have a fundamental appeal. The gospels were written for Semitics. Lamsa gives us the semantics of Semitics. To all who love the rich spiritual life and theology of the Jewish people, Lamsa will have almost as much claim to approach as to Christians. The mountain Assyrian with his Christian religion is as purely Semitic, religion and all, as could be his brother of Jewish or Mohammedan culture and faith.

Greek came into the story of the New Testament merely because it was the European language spoken nearest to the Semitic territory and the only one which had spilled over liberally into that territory. Jews and Jewish Christians in Alexandria, Egypt, which has since the earliest times had large Semitic and Greek population, realizing that they were fast giving up their Aramaic tongue, translated their "biblia" or scriptures with little preparation into the Greek language as the Septuagint. Saint Jerome in the fourth century wrote the Vulgate. Further European translations were based on Greek and Latin, with some scholarly recourse to Hebrew; Aramaic in its modern form was used not at all. The miracle of its discovery and utilization as a new key to the understanding of the Scriptures will constantly impress the reader of Mr. Lamsa's fact-filled pages.

JOHN P. HARRINGTON.

INTRODUCTION

Attempts have been made to portray the life and teaching of Jesus throughout the centuries. He is set forth in a variety of ways by people of different countries as though he belonged to them. Europeans depict him with light hair and blue eyes. Abyssinians portray him as having curly hair, a dark face, and clad in nomadic attire. To the Hindus he is a learned mystic with an ascetic face and pictured meditating in the shadow of the temples. To Russians, he appears like themselves. Semitic peoples claim Jesus truly because he was born and reared among them. Their customs and manners play an important part in his life and teaching. They therefore know and understand him far better than others. While prohibited by the Scriptures to make pictures of any sort, they visualize him with the mental eye.

One of the most amazing facts about Jesus is, regardless of his race and color, he appeals to peoples of all nationalities. His divine personality and his living teaching rise above all barriers and reveal him as he actually was, a man without a country but claimed by people of every country throughout the world. All racial characteristics retire into the background in the unique drama of his life; limitations or prejudices do not interfere with his universal message. Although he was born in a poor home and brought up in a small village town, Jesus appeals alike to the rich and poor, to the conqueror and conquered. Nothing has been able to overshadow his influence in all the centuries.

There is an aspect in the life and teaching of Jesus which could best be depicted by the descendants of his own race from the particular standpoint of their own Oriental life and with due regard to the background of traditions. It is this phase of his teachings and sayings which I am attempting to illustrate in this Commentary.

What I write is based upon customs and practices which have remained undisturbed from early Biblical times up to the eve of the World War.

Strange to say, a fragment of that ancient Semitic civilization had survived, without change, in Mesopotamia and Kurdistan until recent days. These descendants of the once mighty Assyrians and of the Ten Tribes, a small and feeble remnant, were found in seclusion in the fastnesses of the rugged mountainous country north of Iraq.

Since the fall of Nineveh, 610 B.C., empires have risen and fallen; new nations have been born and old nations have perished; invading armies of Greeks, Persians, Arabs, Mongols, Turks, have fought their battles for supremacy upon the plains of Arbela (Mesopotamia). But, these Assyrian descendants were not disturbed by the sound of the triumphant trumpets of the Greek victors in the plains of Arbela nor were they aware of the Persian defeat by the nomad Arab forces at the battle of Kadisia (637 A.D) and the fall of the Persian Empire before the Moslems after the historic battle of Nehaband (642 A.D.). The wave of conquest continued to flow but nothing seemed to interfere with the independence of the Assyrian tribes. None of the conquerors attempted to invade the seclusion of this warrior people. Nor were the Assyrians aware of the changes constantly taking place on the Mesopotamian plains south of their mountain fortresses. It is interesting to know that until about fifteen years ago the Assyrians called the Turks, *Romaye*, which means the Romans. They thought these belonged to the Christian Roman Empire because the Turks invaded Asia Minor by way of Europe and not by way of Mesopotamia.

The survival of these ancient Assyrians, their language and customs, is nothing short of a miracle of divine Providence. Semitic culture and languages have elsewhere either been radically altered or replaced by those of the conquering forces. Even the Jews, in spite of their racial tenacity, were unable to withstand the unavoidable changes; they lost their language and customs. The teach-

ing once written by simple men for uncultured people became a mystery and had to be interpreted with the aid of commentaries. This conclusion is sustained by Dr. W. A. Wigram, a noted English scholar who spent over ten years as a missionary and research worker in Kurdistan. He writes:*

"A strange survival in an isolated corner of the world, these last representatives of the ancient Assyrian stock have hitherto kept up the most primitive of Semitic customs to an extent that can hardly be paralleled elsewhere, even in Mesopotamian marsh districts. As an ancient and fossilized Church, they had also preserved ecclesiastical rites and ceremonies which have either perished altogether elsewhere, or else have survived only in almost unrecognizable form . . . Here are a people who, in the time of the beginning of the Christian era, are found living in the lands where, in the year 600 B.C. the Assyrian stock had been established since history began; nor is there any record of any considerable immigration into, or emigration from, that land, in the interval. Their own traditions affirm that they are of the old Assyrian blood, with a possible intermixture of certain Babylonian or Chaldean elements . . . It was only natural that this old Semitic stock, living where nothing had ever occurred to disturb their habits of life, should keep up the old Semitic customs. They still lived, or did live till the changes of the Great War brought about an alteration, the life of the Old Testament . . . Bible Customs, or those that we call such, were, of course, not peculiar to the Hebrew, but were the common heritage of all the stock to which he belonged."

This is also true of the language. Aramaic is still spoken by the Assyrians in Kurdistan and parts of Mesopotamia. It was the language spoken by Jesus and his disciples in Galilee. It became the vernacular of northern Palestine long before the Babylonian captivity. This was due to the exchange of populations. In 722 B.C. the ten tribes were carried captive to Assyria and their country was repopulated by Assyrians brought from Edessa and other sections beyond the Euphrates. Hebrew was completely lost as a language. The Jews in northern Mesopotamia, Kurdistan and Persia still speak and pray in a dialect of Aramaic known as "Leshan Galoth," the language

*W. A. Wigram: "The Assyrians and their Neighbours," pp. 177, 178, 185 (G. Bell & Sons, London).

of captivity. The dialect spoken in Persia is related to the Chaldean or southern Aramaic.*

"Aramaic was destined to become Israel's vernacular tongue; but before this could come about it was necessary that the national independence should be destroyed and the people removed from their own home. These events prepared the way for that great change by which the Jewish nation parted with its national tongue and replaced it in some districts entirely by Aramaic, in others by the adoption of Aramaized Hebrew forms . . . The dialect of Edessa, which, owing to the Bible version made in it, became the literary language of the Christian Arameans,—bearing pre-eminently the title of Syriac—was certainly also employed in ancient times by Jews."**

Such a change was inevitable. Aramaic had long before become the international language. The Edessan dialect was the *lingua franca* and all literary works were written in it. This was largely due to the long continued influence and power of the Assyrian Empire. Even after the fall of Assyria, the Chaldeans and Persians used the language for purposes of commerce and communication. There were other Aramaic dialects such as Western (Syrian), Chaldean and Hebrew but these dialects were chiefly used in speech and had only a local interest. The Jews and Syrians could not have engaged in commerce and diplomacy without the knowledge of northern Aramaic. The high officials of King Hezekiah requested the ambassador of the Assyrian king to speak to them in Aramaic (2 Kings 18 : 26; Isaiah 36 : 11). This is the case today where there are many dialects in a language and the most expressive of them is used for literary and commercial purposes. For instance, in both England and America, there are many dialects of the English language.

*The towns where Jews speak Aramaic are: In northern Mesopotamia, SINDUR, AMEDIA, BARWAR, ZAKHO, BOHTAN. In Kurdistan, BASHKALA and DIZA. In Persia, UROMIAH and other towns in the province of ADURBAJAN. In other parts Aramaic has been replaced by Arabic and other languages.

**W. Bacher on "Aramaic Language among the Jews". By special permission. From "The Jewish Encyclopedia" Vol. II, copyright by Funk & Wagnalls Company, New York and London.

Palestine was a small country and its inhabitants were chiefly herdsmen. Their vocabulary was limited to their local needs. The insignificance of the kingdoms of Palestine is illustrated by the fact that subjects sought the advice of their rulers in business and other practical affairs. For instance, Saul sought the advice of Samuel in locating his father's lost asses although Samuel was a ruler of Israel. The judgment of Solomon was sought to decide upon the parentage of an infant. Such was not the case in the realms of Assyria, Babylonia and Persia where kings were worshipped as deities and who were unapproachable. In these lands a high civilization existed thousands of years before the birth of Abraham. Aramaic was at that time a literary language and the Law Code of Hammurabi was written in it. During and after the exile, the Jews made extensive use of this language. Josephus and other writers also wrote in Aramaic.

This language has continued to the present day with some slight variations between the written and spoken forms. There is no such thing as modern Aramaic. Language is a growth and cannot be invented in a day or night. The differences between the literary and the vernacular are due to the fact the written language is improved and beautified by the writers in the process of time while the colloquial remains more or less in its original form. The vernacular of any language is therefore the older form. For instance, when the people of Anatolia, who speak Turkish, go to Constantinople or Ankara, they are not able to understand clearly the Turkish speech used there because of its many expressions borrowed from Arabic and European languages. It is indisputable that Aramaic has continued unchanged to the present day. The greatest evidence in support of this is that the same Aramaic words retained in the Greek version of the New Testament are still in use in both the vernacular and the written language. It is significant that all Aramaic literature, from the earliest centuries to the present time, is written without the slightest variation. This is further illustrated by the maintenance of the ancient customs as well as the costumes worn by the

people. There is an amazing similarity to his ancestors in the facial likeness and head gear of the present day Assyrian as shown in the clay tablets made centuries before Christ. In the words of Dr. Wigram:

"One thing is certain, that the Assyrians boast with justice that they alone of all Christian nations still keep as their spoken language what is acknowledged to be the language of Palestine in the first century, and that therefore they alone among Christian nations . . . if we except a few villages that may still exist in the Lebanon . . . use regularly the language of Christ."*

It is thus clear the Assyrians have preserved what might be called the background of the Biblical culture which existed before Nineveh was built and Abraham had migrated to Palestine. They are the direct descendants of the people who laid the foundations of the great civilization which made religion and history. In that part of the ancient world some of the people still lead nomadic lives. The tent, made of the hair of goats, continues to be the home of the roaming tribes. Houses are built in the same style as they were in the days of Hammurabi. Sheepskins persist as containers. Oxen, with their mouths muzzled so as not to eat any of the scarce wheat, are still used for threshing. The earthen oven, dug in the house and heated with the grass gathered from the fields by women, has been continuously used. Sheep and goats are separated as in ancient days. The old-fashioned earthen lamp is lighted with butter and not oil, now as then. Wheat is ground by the hand grinder operated by two women. The ass's millstone is yet used to extract oil. Burdens are now carried on the backs of men, women and animals as they have always been borne. Laborers are roused in the morning by the cock's crowing which announces the hour for work and for prayer just as in Biblical days. Time is still measured by the falling shadows of the sun in this land where clocks are unknown; (2 Kings 20 : 9) at night the servant sits at the door of the house looking for the return of his master and neither can tell the hour because time cannot be measured in the darkness. The

*W. A. Wigram: "The Assyrians and their Neighbours," p. 181 (G. Bell & Sons, London).

spiritual healer and the doctor with his medicinal herbs go about as of yore. The tribal blacksmiths and silversmiths continue their trades secretly. Tables are unknown and the scribes still rest on one knee, reed pen in hand, to copy manuscripts which they rest on the left knee. Styles and fashions of dress have not changed because Easterners wish to perpetuate the ways of their ancestors. Each tribe follows after its own customs and practices. Even Bagdad, an ancient city which has not escaped the invading armies of Mongols and the West, has preserved almost intact her ancient civilization.

"Baghdad bazaars are much the same as in Bible times. . . . Sheep may yet be slain to seal a vow and men know the covenant of bread and salt. Sabaeen silversmiths, who con the stars, ply their trade now as in the days of Father Abraham."*

In contrast with this, one is surprised to see today in Palestine and Syria such modern devices as trolley cars, department stores, soda fountains, news stands, lunch counters and other innovations and to hear many European languages spoken by the new Jewish settlers.

Christianity clearly cannot be understood without a thorough knowledge of Judaism and its Semitic background. These two religions did not develop along parallel lines from two distinctive sources of thought but one is derived from the other. Judaism represents the old order and Christianity the new. In other words, one is the fulfilment of the other. The origin of most of the problem in our Gospels can be traced to Jewish customs embodied in Biblical culture and common to all Semitic people. It is this Semitic atmosphere which connects the Gospels with the Old Testament and the Messianic promises. In those parts of the East where theological books are unknown, religious customs and traditions are followed in daily life by the same conduct from one generation to another without the aid of writings.

Owing to European conquests during the Crusades, the establishment of the Latin kingdom in Syria and the close commercial relations between the people of Syria,

*The National Geographic Magazine, p. 265, Sept. 1933.


Palestine and Europe, western culture penetrated into the Holy Land. Although the ancient order, except in a few isolated regions and small country towns, has almost wholly disappeared from Palestine and Syria, it still remains undiluted among the ancestors of the Hebrews (Assyrians) in Mesopotamia and Kurdistan.







The Gospels are not difficult to understand and religion is not so complicated as some people suppose. They belong to the simplest and most direct literature ever penned by man. Most people have been taught to think of religion as something mysterious otherwise it could not be religion. This view was common in early times because of the scarcity of books. The owner of a book became the sole authority in interpreting the contents. This situation was later changed with the multiplicity of books. Today Bibles are given away free. People have broken away from established traditions. They think for themselves and are satisfied only with facts.

The problem in understanding the Gospels is largely due to the rapid changes of customs and manners in Europe and America. Added to this is the difficulty caused by translations from a translation. The Greek translation of the Gospels does not adequately express Semitic thought because the manner of speech characteristic of the Orient is alien to the mind of the westerner. Christianity was conceived in the minds of Semitic prophets and scriptures were primarily written for the sole guidance of their own people. Just as modern inventions are the product of the Occidental mind and cannot be easily understood by the people of the East without the help of Americans and Europeans, so must an eastern religion, such as Christianity in its origins, have understanding and help from the East.

Eastern Christianity preceded that of Greece and Rome by many years. Jesus and his disciples were Galileans. The first Christians were Galileans, Jews, Syrians and Assyrians. All these peoples were closely held together by ties of lineage, language and culture. It was natural for Christianity to take root in its own native ground. From there it has spread.

Greek culture and literature are undoubtedly the basis of European civilization. Greece has always served also as a clearing house for Semitic ideas and religions as well as commerce because Greece is the European country nearest to Asia Minor and Syria. Christianity penetrated into Europe by way of Greece and Greek became the language of the scriptures in the west. This is true today of the Chinese and Japanese prayer books translated by English and American missionaries from English. The Chinese and Japanese think the English translation is the original but the English is a translation from Latin and the Latin from Greek. It is true Europe received its culture and religion by way of Greece but the Greeks imported them from Asia only after their defeat of the Persians and conquest of the East. Previous to this, the Persians carried Oriental culture to Europe during their conquests of parts of Greece. It was the Greek who copied the East and not vice versa. Writing was common, gold and silver were mined, silk and cotton woven, temples built and priesthoods established in Assyria and Babylon centuries before the Greeks were even known as a people. It is a matter of history, when the Greeks conquered Persia, they were amazed at the wealth and the art of gold and silver craft found in the luxurious palaces. Persia was so far beyond Greece in culture, Alexander the Great decided to make Babylon his capital and to further the alliance, he married the daughter of Darius the Persian King.

This is not all. The Greeks borrowed their alphabet from the Orient and its characters still retain the original Semitic names and to some extent, the original forms which are derived from Semitic objects. The characters have no meaning in Greek, Latin and other European languages but they are well understood by those who speak Aramaic. The first alphabet character, *alpha*, is an Assyrian word for ox and the character  A represents the head of an ox. The ox was an Assyrian god and the first letter in the Aramaic word for god is *alep*. The second alphabet character, *beta*, in Aramaic is *bet* which is

a shortened form of the word *beta* meaning house. The form of this character is  B and resembles the structure of a one-room Assyrian house. The Greeks turned the word upside down and divided it into two because the Greeks had two-story houses. *Gamma* is the third alphabet character. It is a mispronunciation of the Aramaic word *gamla* which means, in this case, camel. The Aramaic character is  which resembles a camel. The Latin letter c, from which the English letter is derived, is due to the mistake of the Romans who pronounced *gamla* as though it were *camla*. P, in Aramaic, is  from *poma* meaning mouth. I, Aramaic  is derived from *eina* meaning eye and the character is a sketch of the eye. S, Aramaic *simket*  is derived from *sahra* (moon). N,  is derived from *narga*, combination of pick and axe. Evidences of civilization demonstrate that culture, philosophy and religion came from Asia to Europe and not brought to Asia from Europe. Even the Armenians who are recognized as one of the ancient Christian people used the Aramaic alphabet and language in Church services from the second century to 500 A.D. when Mesrop invented the present Armenian alphabet. Previous to the fifth century, Armenian Christianity was closely allied to the Assyrian Church and its leaders and writers were largely Assyrians. The Eastern version of the Scriptures was used until after the Monophysite controversy and then for political reasons the Armenian Church was allied with the Christian Church in the Byzantine Empire.

Greek culture, philosophy and religion had no influence on Jesus and his disciples or the early Christians. The Jews resisted every influence not Semitic. Greek customs and manners were forbidden. During the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, the Jews were not permitted to learn Greek or use Greek ceremonies. The first part of the Talmud, the Mishna, emphatically declared it was worse for a Jew to learn Greek than to eat swine flesh. These laws were strictly observed with few exceptions by the Palestinian Jews who jealously preserved their religion,

customs and language from contamination. The following is a quotation from Renan, the famous French scholar and archeologist, who spent many years in the East in research work for the Imperial Government of France:

"It is not probable that Jesus knew Greek. This language was very little spread in Judea beyond the classes who participated in the government, and the towns inhabited by pagans, like Caesarea . . .

". . . Neither directly nor indirectly, then, did any element of Greek culture reach Jesus. He knew nothing beyond Judaism; his mind preserved that free innocence which an extended and varied culture always weakens. In the very bosom of Judaism he remained a stranger to many efforts often parallel to his own."*

Nearly all Jewish literature from the fourth century B.C. to the ninth century A.D. was written in Aramaic. Prayers in Aramaic continue to be generally used by Jews in all parts of the world. The liturgies of ancient Christian Churches in Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia are written in the same language. The Greek language has never been used for such purposes. There are no traces of Greek customs and culture east of the Euphrates. If Greek influence had been strong in the first and second centuries in the East, the word *Christos* would have been used instead of *Mshikha* (Messiah) in the Eastern text and the Aramaic word *shlekhey*, messengers, would have been *apostolos*. This is not the case. The Greeks Hellenized many Aramaic names. Bar-Hebrews, the famous Eastern historian of the twelfth century, noted this fact and stated the Greeks changed the forms of many Aramaic nouns and did not pronounce them as given in the originals. For instance, *Nokh*, derived from Aramaic *nokha* meaning rest, becomes *No-kaus* (Noah) in Greek; *Yacob*, derived from Aramaic *ekba* meaning heel, becomes *Jacobus* in Greek; *Bar-soma*, derived from Aramaic *bar* meaning son and *soma* meaning fasting, is pronounced *Bar-somos*; the Aramaic *Eshoo*, derived from the Hebrew *Yasha* meaning to save,

*"The Life of Jesus" by Ernest Renan; A. L. Burt Company, Publishers, pp. 90, 92.

becomes *Iesus* (Jesus); *kuria*, Aramaic for town, becomes *korios*; *paracleta*, derived from Aramaic *prak* meaning to save or comfort, becomes *paracletos*. A few Greek words are found in early Aramaic but these were in common use, such as *estategy*, soldiers; *estadawata*, miles; *costonaries*, guards. Some Jews used Greek names but this does not necessarily mean they spoke Greek. The same practice is carried on today. (Cf. my introduction to the *Four Gospels* for further illustrations, p. xvi).

The Jews in Alexandria spoke Greek because Aramaic was not understood. This explains why Philo the Jewish philosopher wrote in Greek. The Old Testament translation, known as the Septuagint, was made into Greek by Jews for Jews who understood neither Aramaic nor Hebrew. This Greek text of the Scriptures was not used in Palestine where it would not have been understood and where the original texts were in common use. It is worth mentioning that the Greek Septuagint was not accepted or used by Eastern Christians. This is so today. The Eastern Version of the Old Testament is the authorized text of Nestorians, Chaldean Roman Catholics, Jacobites and other Christian groups and its antiquity and originality are strongly supported by all of them regardless of theological differences. The Septuagint was rejected partly because it contained the books of the Apocrypha which were not included in the Jewish Canon. This question was debated at the Jewish Council of Jamnia in 90 A.D. and settled in favor of the Palestinian decision. It was only after St. Jerome made the Latin Vulgate in the fourth century A.D. that the Apocrypha was accepted as canonical by the Roman Catholic Church.

Had the Gospels been written by Jesus, probably they would have told the story differently but the Gospels were written by Galileans in their own northern Aramaic dialect for the use of their own people. Their Lord was a Galilean who spoke Galilean Aramaic and inexperienced as these Galileans were, they would not have attempted to record this sacred material in an alien language. They did not have access to Bible manuscript and commen-

taries but they did the best they could in recording the sayings and works of the Master which they had heard and learned by heart. The Gospels were written for the followers who had seen and heard Jesus. The simple folk around the lake of Galilee were the people to whom this new teaching appealed. They were the likely ones to welcome an account, written in the language they spoke, of the words and works of their beloved Master and not the Judean enemies who had regarded him as a malefactor and had crucified him. Jerusalem was an international city and many languages and dialects were spoken there as was seen in the days of Pentacost. The people of other nationalities would not have been interested at this time in the life of a man who had met a horrible death and whose teaching was not understood and, except for the Galilean merchants who had become followers of Jesus, the Jews in Jerusalem and other prosperous and cultured centers were satisfied with their own religion and were not ready to welcome anything which tended to disturb long established traditions.

Dr. F. C. Burkitt of Cambridge says:

"But our Lord and his first disciples spoke Aramaic; there is nothing to suggest that they were acquainted with the current Greek version. In the Synagogues they would hear the Scriptures read in the original Hebrew, followed by a more or less stereotyped rendering into the Aramaic of Palestine, the language of the country, itself a cousin of Hebrew. A faithfully reported saying therefore of Jesus or of Peter ought to agree with the Hebrew against the Greek, or at least ought not to acquire its point and appropriateness from a peculiar rendering in the Greek" . . .

. . . "Apart from questions of language and purely literary criticism, the three Synoptic Gospels might be translations from the Aramaic. The main ideas of the Synoptic Gospels, the fundamental phrases round which move the thoughts belonging to the Gospel, all have their explanation and illustration from contemporary Judaism. The Kingdom of God, the Christ or Messiah, the Day of Judgment, treasure in heaven, Abraham's bosom,—all these are Jewish ideas, entirely foreign to the native thought of the Graeco-Roman world."*

*Dr. F. C. Burkitt: "The Earliest Sources for the Life of Jesus," pp. 25 and 29. E. P. Dutton & Co., New York, and Constable Publishers, London, England.

All the disciples of Jesus were Galileans except Judas who betrayed him. They remained loyal and even though at first they deserted their countryman and Lord, none of them had the least idea of betraying him. They were even ready to die with Jesus. They stood by him until the servants of the high priest and the temple officers seized him in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter followed even to the courtyard of the high priest's palace. Jesus had spent three years preaching in Galilee and most of his followers were Galileans. They accompanied him to the feast in Jerusalem, saw him die on the cross, and returned to Galilee mourning and lamenting his death. Many of these men and women had faith in him and were ready to champion his cause and continue his mission. As these Galilean followers were the ones who saw Jesus after his resurrection, they were the first to bear witness to the Risen Christ. The Jerusalemites and the Jews of the south continued to doubt and deny that Christ had risen. Today they insist his body was stolen by the Galileans. Also, had the Gospels been written by Jews in the Chaldean dialect, the contents would have been quite different. We would doubtless read about one who had blasphemed against God and defied the authorities and who went to the cross as a malefactor. Easterners, however, never write books about men whom they have condemned.

These facts clearly support the view that the Gospels were written in northern Aramaic and not in Chaldean or southern Aramaic. Complications naturally arise when attempts are made to go back to the original Aramaic by way of a totally alien language like Greek or even the Chaldean dialect. Take for example, the Greek word *Logos* is a direct translation of the northern Aramaic word, *Miltha*, which means word or utterance and not the southern Aramaic word, *Memra*, which means a sentence.

What seems obscure in the Gospels becomes quite lucid when translated from the Eastern text written in northern Aramaic. Dr. Dalman is cognizant of the influence of northern Aramaic in Palestine. He writes:

"The spread of Aramaic in the originally Hebrew Palestine must already have begun in the year 721 B.C., when Samaria was peopled by Mesopotamian colonists. Through the influence of the Babylonian and, later, the Persian Governments it continued to spread . . . finally reaching Southern Palestine, when the leading classes were deported from there and supplanted by the alien element. The Judæan exiles on their return made a last attempt to preserve their native language."*

Dr. Burney of Oxford University is equally explicit on this point. He stated that:

"Even in pre-exilis times (2 Kings 18:26) Aramaic was the *lingua franca* of international communication. It must have been widely used, along with Babylonian, in the Neo-Babylonian kingdom. Cuneiform tablets of the late Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenian periods, bear Aramaic docketts; and scribes or secretaries were employed for the purpose of writing Aramaic upon parchment along with those whose business it was to write Babylonian in cuneiform upon clay tablets . . . The mass of the people who did not read books came more and more to speak Aramaic exclusively and to lose the knowledge of Hebrew."**

The Gospels were written very early, probably ten or fifteen years after the resurrection of Jesus. There is no reason to date them later. Aramaic writing was common. The sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament were in circulation. The traditions of the Jewish elders were also in writing. The Gospel writers were witnesses who had seen and heard Jesus. They were Galileans who accepted him at the beginning and not Jews who rejected him.*** They remembered what he had said and done. Had the Gospels been written in 60 or 90 A.D. writers could not have mastered the extensive material, especially if they were writing in Greek, without a knowledge of Aramaic and without Aramaic documents. For instance, how could a Japanese of today reproduce the Gettysburg speech of

*Gustave Dalman: *Jesus-Jeshua*. Studies in the Gospels, p. 8. By permission of The Macmillan Company, New York, and S. P. C. K., Publishers, London, England.

**C. F. Burney: *The Aramaic Origin of the Fourth Gospel*, p. 21 (Oxford University Press, New York).

***The Galileans were Jews by faith and not by race. See further information in the Commentary.

Lincoln in Japanese with no knowledge of English and without a copy of it? It is more reasonable to suppose the Gospels were written early in Aramaic and in their native setting. They were later translated into Greek by Jewish and Syrian Christian missionaries just as translations are made today on the mission field. These translators knew the Koine or vernacular Greek but they were not sufficiently familiar with Greek idioms and they thought their own Aramaic idioms would mean the same thing in Greek. This is why the translators render literally such idioms as "he breathed on them" which means in Aramaic "he gave them courage" (John 20 : 22). To-day when a foreigner thinks in his own language and speaks in English, his idioms become just as meaningless.

The Gospels contain only an outline of the teaching of Jesus and do not go into details for two reasons. First, because the issues were still fresh in the minds of the readers who were contemporaries and, second, because Jesus when he preached did not explain the issues but answered the questions directly. For instance, when an American addresses an audience on such issues as prohibition, repeal, N.R.A., oil, he takes for granted the people understand what he is talking about. A writer does the same. Fifteen years later a high school boy or girl reading a book on these questions would need to have them explained. If the Gospels were written later, the writers would have had to explain in detail the issues that were alive in the time of Jesus, and if they were written originally in Greek, they could not have retained their Semitic style. The Greek translation contains some Aramaic expressions and explains their meaning but there is not a single sentence in the Eastern text which is not in Aramaic.

It is worth mentioning, in the Epistles one comes in direct contact with Greek culture, philosophy and manners totally alien to Semites. St. Paul denounces the immoral practices of pagan Gentiles in Romans 1 : 26. They were unknown and revolting to Semitic peoples especially those who were not in touch with the foreign world.

The obscurities in the Greek and other versions are due to mistranslations of Aramaic words having diverse meanings and to misunderstanding of Oriental parables and allegories. The original writers were not responsible for these obscurities because they are not found in the Aramaic just as Shakespeare cannot be held responsible for mistranslation of his works and plays by the people of the East who are unfamiliar with Victorian English idioms and customs. These biblical obscurities are clearly understood when rendered from Aramaic by those familiar with the idioms and terms of speech in both languages. According to the Greek text, translated in the King James' version, Luke 14 : 26 reads: "If any man come to me and hate not his father he cannot be my disciple." The Eastern text, "He who comes to me and does not put aside his father, etc," is more in keeping with Jesus' teaching about loving and honoring one's parents. Missionaries today put aside their parents to go to the mission field but this does not mean they hate them. The Aramaic word *saney* means to remove aside or, to hate. Through confusion of meaning the harsh word was used instead of the more appropriate word. Mark 10 : 30 reads: "and mothers and children and lands with persecutions"; this was due to confusion of the word *amhatha*, maid servants, with *aemhatha*, mothers; and the mistranslation of the Aramaic word *rdopia*, which means pursuits, and not persecutions. This is in accord with the teaching of Jesus who offered larger rewards to those who followed him. In Luke 14 : 5, the King James' version reads: "which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit" and the Eastern text reads: "which one of you if his son or his ox should fall into a pit." The Greek translator confused the Aramaic word *brey*, his son, for *khmarey*, his ass. The first part of this word was probably blotted out and the translator inferred the word might mean ass as the following word was ox. Easterners, however, in their parables and talk are more likely to link the human being with the animal for emphasis rather than two animals.

This work is not a critical commentary discussing tex-

tual matters. The material pertaining to textual criticism is so extensive it cannot be dealt with even briefly in this volume. This I expect to do at a later time. Based upon my knowledge of Aramaic and ancient customs which have survived unaltered in my native country, my purpose here is to throw new light on the Scriptures. I have had in mind in the translation of *The Four Gospels* and in this work, the thousands of earnest Bible students who would welcome such help. My aim throughout is to illuminate and strengthen the teaching of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

I believe Jesus could have walked on the water if there was a need. He could have used his divine power. The question is not *could he* but *did he*. Jesus refused the Jews when they demanded a sign (magic). He did not pose as a magician. I do believe in the divinity of Jesus. I do not question the power of Jesus who has revealed God to humanity in such an abundant way. I believe Jesus opened the eyes of the blind, cleansed the lepers, raised the dead and that he, himself, rose again. I insist Jesus never worked any magic or wonders in order to persuade the people. I firmly believe in His divine mission and in His miraculous powers which are still being demonstrated in the lives of His faithful followers. Millions of souls have been healed by Him; untold numbers of broken hearts have been comforted by His words of life; men and women have surrendered to Him in all the centuries. Herein is found the greatest miracle of His mission which has not lost its power even at the present day. This fact and the successful continuance of His Church are the most convincing proofs of the living Christ who abideth forever.

GEORGE M. LAMSA.

SHORT HISTORY of the EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Christianity began in Galilee when Jesus was preaching there. He was the founder of this faith and not his apostles. He was the corner stone which the Jews had rejected. His early converts were Galileans who became identified with his movement. They were called Nazarenes and later became known as *Mshikhaye*, Christians. This faith spread in the East along Semitic line of thought from the earliest beginnings and it has remained independent of western theology to this day. The kingdom of Ur-Hai,* today known as Urfa, was Christianized by Thaddeus, one of the twelve, and Mari, one of the seventy. The geographical location and affinity in language and customs made it easier for the Galilean missionaries to approach first those people who were closely akin to them and was in accordance with instructions given by their Lord: "Go ye first to the lost sheep of Israel" (the lost ten tribes). These people were taken captive and settled around the river Khabor in Edessa, in Mesopotamia and Persia. It was long predicted the Messiah (Christ) would gather the scattered people of Israel.

Abgarus, king of Edessa, wrote and invited Jesus to come to his city. Jesus promised to send one of his disciples. The so-called "Greeks" who wanted to see Jesus personally were probably men from Edessa. The Eastern text states they were Gentiles and not Greeks (John 12 : 20). These men spoke the same language spoken by the Galileans. Euseius stressed the remarkable and rapid spread of Christianity in Edessa from the Apostolic age, the firm foothold which it held in that region, and the

*A Western Aramaic name. In northern Aramaic, Ur-khai, a place of life. Kh are pronounced as H in Western Aramaic.

importance which it played in the evangelization of the countries east of the Euphrates and Persia.

Edessa became an evangelizing center in the East as Antioch was in Syria. From Edessa missionaries went to Persia and other eastern lands. St. Thomas passed through it on his way to Malabar, India. This city suffered during the Parthian and Roman wars. The Roman Army under Crassus was defeated at Carrhae, 53 B.C. In 162 A.D. during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius, war broke out again over the question of Armenia and the small kingdom of *Ur-hai* Osrhoene. The Romans were victorious. Seleucia, a large city in Persia, was destroyed by Avidius Cassius' Army. Thereafter whatever Greek culture was planted in Mesopotamia disappeared and gave way to Aramaic. This change from Greek to Aramaic, in this part of the East where Greek had been established by the Greek conquest of Asia, third century B.C., took place when Christianity was spreading in Syria and Persia through the Aramaic language. The Edessan dialect was its language and, as is seen, Edessa became the great literary center of the Aramaic language. Greek totally vanished from the provinces in the Euphrates Valley with the exception of a few learned men. Centuries after, it totally disappeared from Mesopotamia. The superiority of the Aramaic language in Edessa and Mesopotamia and the influence which it has exerted in the East is strongly pointed out by Mar-Yacob (Jacob) Eugene Manna, Chaldean Roman Catholic metropolitan of Armenia. A distinguished Aramaic scholar whose writings are in that language and who is recognized as an authority by Roman Catholics and other Christians in the East says:

"After Christ, our Lord, the first books which came into our possession, are the Old and the New Testaments. That is to say, the version which is called Peshitta. Without dispute it is even earlier than the writings which came down to us from the works of Bar-Dasan, who was living in the latter part of the second century . . ."

"It is well known that they were written in the language of the river (Aramaic). That is the island between Tigris and Euphrates. For it was in *Ur-hai*, the mother of cities of Mesopotamia at that

time, that the blessed apostles, evangelizers of the East preached at first, and in it was established the first church; and from it by Mar-mari the blessed, the Christian religion was spread and extended throughout the island, in Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Media, and in the rest of the neighboring countries. And this speech of the river as those from the beginning bear witness, was richer and purer than the speech of the rest of the other parts."*

Edessa became a battle field between Romans and Persians. It was captured in 116 A.D. by the Romans under Trajan, and later in 216 A.D. by Emperor Caracalla. Roman victories and defeats in the East in connection with the Parthians and Persians were the chief occasions for the extension of Christianity beyond the Euphrates. The struggle for the control of the fertile and prosperous provinces in Mesopotamia caused continuous warfare between these Empires. The Romans persistently invaded Persia but in most cases, they suffered heavy losses. Thousands of Christians were taken captive by the Persians. Carus, the Roman Emperor, died in Persia during a campaign. In 260 A.D. Valerian's army was completely defeated by Shapur I at Edessa. Nisibin and Carrhae also fell before the Persian Army and the emperor was taken prisoner.

Prior to the conversion of Constantine and the treaty between Persia and Rome, streams of captives continued to move towards Persia. Under the Sassanian dynasty, Persians penetrated as far as Jerusalem and Antioch, burning and destroying buildings and taking captives. But, while Rome continued to persecute Christians, the Persians tolerated them because they were the enemies of Rome and so while the Christians in the Roman Empire were in hiding, their brethren in Persia were prosperous and well organized. Schools of Christian learning were established in many parts of the East, as at Edessa and Gundi-Shapur. Writers like Bar-Desan (154-222), Aphraates (280-350), Ephraim (4 cent. A.D.), commented on the Scriptures. Aphraates became bishop of the monastery of St. Matthew near Mosul. This famous

*Morceaux Choisis de Litterature Arameenne, Premiere Partie. Mossoul Imprimerie Des Peres Dominicains, 1901.

writer mentions the New Testament in his native tongue. The Council of Nicaea, confirmed by the bishops of the Eastern Church at the Council of Seleucia, the Persian capital (410 A.D.) was after his time.

Persecutions began in Persia in the middle of the fourth century some time after the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as the state religion. The policy of the Persian government towards Christian subjects changed. They were regarded with suspicion as allies of Rome but while many martyrdoms took place and church buildings were destroyed, the Eastern Church was now strongly entrenched everywhere. Some of the Persian kings were friendly to the eastern patriarchs and not a few of the princes and high officials had become Christian. Both Persian and Assyrian Christians occupied influential positions as physicians, educators and financiers in the service of the Persian "King of Kings." Nor should it be forgotten that by this time copies of the Scriptures and other writings were widely circulated and commentaries on them were in circulation.

The Eastern Church played a conspicuous part in the history of Christianity. It successfully withstood both Roman and Persian persecutions. Zeno, the Roman Emperor (east), was persistent in his effort to compel Eastern Christians to accept image worship and the veneration of Mary as the mother of God but, though thousands of these Christians were killed because of their refusal, the church remained loyal to its apostolic teachings. The separation of the Western Church from the Eastern Church at the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) left the eastern Christians alone to face the brunt of the invading forces of Mohammedans. Nevertheless this Church maintained its position and continued to send missionaries to India, China and elsewhere, and continued to increase in strength. It furthermore gained favor from the Mongol emperors who invaded the East in the thirteenth century. The Moslem kingdom of Mesopotamia came to an end; the Khalif, Mustasim Billah, was killed in 1256 A.D.; and the army of Hulagu, the Mongol, marched victoriously towards Syria in the hope

of capturing Jerusalem. His successor, Abaga, tried to enlist the support of western rulers, especially of King Edward of England but nothing came out of it. Argun Khan, his successor, who was nominally Christian, sent Yahb-Alaha, a Chinese by birth and a Christian archbishop, as ambassador to the courts of Europe and to the Pope. He was received cordially by the rulers and by the cardinals but as the papacy was vacant at this time, his mission was futile.

There was a turn in the tide in the fourteenth century with the coming of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane. The Eastern Church suffered heavy losses in lives and property. Many parts of Assyria were depopulated by the Tartar hordes. Churches, monasteries and manuscripts were destroyed. Dioceses in lower Mesopotamia and in Persia were abandoned. The catastrophe was so complete the Church has never since recovered. Only the Church in the mountain districts of Kurdistan escaped the vandals and its organization continued intact until the World War of 1914. It remains in a weakened and fragmentary condition near Mosul and Bagdad.

Scriptural quotations are from the authorised King James text published by A. J. Holman Company.

ST. MATTHEW

Matthew was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. He was also called Levi (Mark 2 : 14; Luke 5 : 29). Eastern Christians have always believed that Matthew and Zaccheus are the same person (Luke 19 : 2). The name Zaccheus means victorious. He was a native of Galilee and a publican or tax collector at Capernaum and later at Jericho. It was the policy of the Roman provincial government to transfer such officials from one place to another. This is done in the East.

As a publican Matthew could read and write as these were indispensable qualifications for his post. His experience in this office is seen in his arrangement of the material in his gospel. It is probable that he first prepared a list of the sayings or logia, the words of Jesus, and then a list of His important deeds. The sayings of Jesus have always been in demand for healing purposes and the apostle probably supplied this demand while travelling with his Master and after. After the resurrection, additional material had to be added in the form of scrolls. He thus inserted a detailed outline of the life and teachings of Jesus correlating all his material and giving the names of localities where they had travelled, the time, the occasion and other items of information.

This gospel was primarily written for the Jews who had repudiated the Messianic claims of Jesus. Matthew attempted to convince the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah, the Christ, and that the Scriptures have been fulfilled in Him. In other words Matthew, a Galilean defended his Master before the Jews who denounced Him even after His death.

The gospel of Matthew, according to the Eastern text is known as the Preaching of Matthew; that is to say, Matthew's version of the life and teaching of our Lord.

It is obvious that this title was given by the compiler or the scribe who assembled the scrolls together and who was himself responsible for additional material such as the birth and genealogy of Jesus. These issues were raised later. The question of the birth of a famous man always arises after he attains power and prominence. The first Christians were concerned only in what Jesus said and did and not about where and how he was born. This is true of many great living religious teachers in our day. We know them and their works but we know nothing about their birth and background which are generally written years after they have passed away. This is truer of the Eastern people, where dates of birth and death are not recorded and are only known in connection with important events, such as wars, special taxations, persecutions, the rise and fall of rulers and kings.

Authorship in the East is understood differently than in western lands. A book written about the preaching of Matthew or a compilation of Matthew's writings would be known as the Book of Matthew. This is because the copyist does not consider himself an author of the material he writes or compiles. A book written by Joshua about Moses will be known as the book of Moses and Joshua's name would not be included in it. For example, the books of Moses and Joshua give the details of the death and burial of Moses and Joshua. How could they have recorded their own deaths? They had written tribal records in their possession which the later scribe arranged in chronological order with supplementary material after their deaths. For example, some years ago a famous Assyrian poet composed a popular song about Eshie, father of the Assyrian patriarch who was poisoned in Persia. The song today is known as the song of Eshie but the poet is a cousin of mine whose name is Eshoo (Jesus). Moreover, the writings on the scrolls never contain the name of the author or the copyist especially in the case of sacred literature.

The differences between the gospels are largely due to the nature of material, oral sources, difficulties in obtaining complete sets of scrolls from which to copy and

the locality for which the text was produced. The material that would have appealed to the Jews in Judaea would have been repulsive to Galileans and Syrians. This is why Mark and John omitted the issue of Jesus' genealogy and the accounts of the birth. On the other hand, Matthew omitted the story of the woman in Samaria because the Jews hated the Samaritans and a favorable account of a discourse between Jesus as a prophet and a Samaritan woman would have been repulsive to the Jews. John, however, seized the opportunity to convince the Samaritans and Gentiles that Jesus was not only seeking the Jewish people but the Gentiles.

This practice of omitting and adding material in sacred books is still continued in the East as illustrated by Nestorian manuscripts, some of which were written in the fifth century A.D. and recently published by Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Presbyterians. The books based upon these manuscripts vary according to the beliefs of those who use them. Roman Catholics omit what is against their teaching and insert what was formerly rejected by the author as a heresy. Anglicans omit the names of some Eastern fathers who denounced the formulae, "Mary, mother of God" and "God died on the Cross" stating that Mary was only the mother of Jesus and that Jesus died as a man. Presbyterians, on the other hand, print accurately from the manuscripts. The original authors long dead are surely not responsible for later changes made in their writings.

There is no doubt that one of the apostles wrote the material which was the basis of all the gospels and that Matthew was the writer. Writing was common at that time (Acts 15 : 23). Epistles were exchanged between Christians of Antioch and the Apostles of Jerusalem and between Paul and the churches in Asia Minor. Eusebius quotes Papias to the effect that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew, that is, Aramaic. He further states that Matthew and John were the only apostles who left recorded comments. Tradition all over the East verifies this. Matthew's gospel was placed first when the scrolls were compiled because it was the first written document.

The early Christians ought to have known which was the first document and who was its author. Had they known that dispute would have arisen over the authorship of these gospels they would have handed down to us written evidence of dates and other facts. It must be remembered that hundreds of books were burned by pagans during the ten persecutions when much Christian literature was destroyed. And yet the information these writings contained was handed down orally.

The so-called Q document is a pure hypothesis. The variations in the gospels were large, due to the fact that some of the scribes had no access to the new material owing to their isolation. For instance, how could an Anglican missionary in Uganda without any contact with England know about the changes in the Prayer Book?



GOSPEL LIGHT

COMMENTS WITH STORIES

THE SONS OF THAMAR

And Judas begat Phares and Zara of Thamar; and Phares begat Esrom; and Esrom begat Aram; Matt. 1 : 3.

Jews were polygamists like many other Oriental peoples. Men of wealth and nobility married several wives and this custom was also followed by men of the poorer classes. In every case the name of the mother is given with that of her son. It often happens that a man may have several sons who bear the same name but of different mothers. Thus the name Zara may be given to three or four boys who have the same father but they are distinguished from one another by being known as Zara the son of Thamar. It is also interesting to know that if a boy called Zara dies and a son is born to the same mother, the same name might be given to him. This fact explains why the name of the mother is so often mentioned in connection with the kings of Israel and Judah.



MARY THE MOTHER OF JESUS

And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ. Matt. 1 : 16.

Matthew traces the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham to Joseph. In doing this he used the Aramaic word *awled* which means begat or caused to be born. When he deals with Joseph in his genealogy he changes

awled which is masculine gender into *etteled*, feminine gender. "Jacob begat Joseph, the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus." The reference to Mary is to show that Jesus was born of her and not of the other wives of Joseph. Whenever a reference is made to a particular son, the name of the mother is mentioned throughout the Scriptures. Whenever a king's name is mentioned his mother's name is also mentioned to distinguish her from the other wives of the king. If Joseph had no other wives except Mary, the word *awled* would have been used in the case of Joseph as in the other instances. The sixteenth verse would then read "Joseph begat Jesus," but as Mary's name is mentioned the word *etteled* is substituted for the word *awled* to indicate that Mary was the mother of Jesus. Even today in many eastern countries where polygamy is still practised, whenever a son is mentioned, reference is made to his mother as the one who gave birth to him.



MARY'S ESPOUSAL TO JOSEPH

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise; When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost.
Matt. 1 : 18.

The Aramaic word for espoused is *makhirta*, derived from the Aramaic *makhar*, to purchase, to acquire for a price.

The marriage customs are still retained in most Eastern countries. The Hebrew marriage custom is preserved especially among a remnant of Assyrians and other ancient people whose civilization and social life have remained unchanged. Brides are paid for as Jacob did when he served Laban for fourteen years for his two Assyrian wives (Genesis 29 : 18). The dowry is paid to the father of the bride in the form of money or animals. This bargaining is done in much the same way as bargains are made for other articles. The price of a maiden is deter-

mined according to her social standing, beauty, weight and health.

The marriage custom in Syria, Egypt, Palestine and some parts of the East is different from the Hebrew. The father of the girl pays the man who marries his daughter. This is done by furnishing an expensive trousseau.

As the courtship of a woman is unknown in the East, love is tried out only after marriage. Men marry women whom they have never known or seen. The match is made by the parents of the prospective bridegroom or by a professional matchmaker who is instructed to secure a suitable woman. Oriental parents generally think more of physical strength than of beauty because the value of a wife depends upon her ability to work and care for the home.

When a bride is found, her parents are informed. A group of elders and noblemen, selected from the town, are then sent to the house of the prospective bride to bargain about the dowry. After the hearty reception and lavish entertainment, the father of the bride again greets the guests. He says to them, "You have come over my eyes. My house is yours." The chief bargainer then responds, "We are honored by you. We are here to seek your hand," which means to enter into a relationship. To this the father modestly replies, "My daughter is a pair of shoes for your feet." Then the business of bargaining begins and lasts for five or six hours often with heated and even bitter remarks. If no satisfactory decision is reached, the matter is dropped either temporarily or permanently. Meanwhile the matchmaker has another party in mind and the delegation is sent there in the hope of a better bargain. This is not always easy for the father of the bride generally demands a high price on the principle that the higher the price the greater the honor to him and his family. When the price is settled, the dowry is paid and preparations for the wedding begin. The bride thus automatically becomes the wife and property of her husband.

It is not unusual for men to marry girls of nine or ten

years of age. In some cases these early marriages are due to inheritance laws. When a father dies leaving a young daughter, she is often given in marriage to one of her nearest relatives even though she is under age and her prospective husband an old man. This is done to protect property rights. Orphan girls are invariably given in marriage even though they are under age, because they have no means of support. When a girl child is given in marriage, secret treaties are often orally made between the parents of the bridegroom and the bride. These pledges are sacredly respected and secretly kept. The bridegroom promises to honor his newly wedded child wife and treat her as his own sister. She lives and sleeps with him but retains her virginity until she arrives at the marital age when she becomes his full-pledged wife. The token of her virginity is then witnessed by two elderly women on behalf of her parents in the presence of the mother of the bridegroom. This is very important because if the girl is discovered not to be a virgin her husband can get an annulment on the ground of deception.

This ancient Bible custom is still most carefully followed to protect the wife from future reproach in case her husband decides to divorce her. This token of virginity furthermore is kept as long as the wife lives: "If any man take a wife, and go in unto her, and hate her, And give occasions of speech against her, and bring up an evil name upon her, and say, I took this woman, and when I came to her, I found her not a maid: Then shall the father of the damsel, and her mother, take and bring forth the tokens of the damsel's virginity unto the elders of the city in the gate: And the damsel's father shall say unto the elders, I gave my daughter unto this man to wife and he hateth her; And, lo, he hath given occasions of speech against her, saying, I found not thy daughter a maid; and yet these are the tokens of my daughter's virginity. And they shall spread the cloth before the elders of the city. And the elders of that city shall take that man and chastise him;" (Deut. 22: 13-18.) Oriental customs such as these are unknown to

Occidentals because they are not discussed publicly as Orientals regard them as sacred secrets. Even missionaries who have lived all their lives in the East know nothing of these private domestic affairs which are of daily occurrence. They are known only to the parents and relatives who are concerned in a marriage affair.

According to this ancient custom, still observed, Mary was given to Joseph when she was a young girl. If she had been only Joseph's sweetheart and lived with her parents, then Joseph could not have found that she had conceived a child and there would have been no ground for divorce. This was what probably happened. Joseph had married Mary when she was a child in terms of the above contract. But to his surprise and dismay he discovered that she was with child and questioned her fidelity. He considered the matter carefully and decided to divorce her secretly to avoid the tragedy of having her stoned to death as was required by the Mosaic law. (Deut. 22 : 21.) In this dilemma the angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and revealed to him that Mary his wife was not only pure but was exceptionally favored of the Lord. For she was to be the mother of the Messiah. Joseph's suspicions at once disappeared and he accepted Mary as his lawful wife and kept the whole matter under cover. In fact Joseph really had to keep this whole matter to himself because the people of Nazareth would not have believed their story about the angelic visitation. The information was probably imparted by Mary to some of her closest women friends after the Resurrection and they, in turn, communicated the facts to the Apostles but so far as the people of Nazareth were concerned they always thought of Jesus as the Son of Joseph.



A RIGHTEOUS MAN

Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. Matt. 1 : 19.

K*ena* is an Aramaic word meaning righteous, pious, gentle, quiet and humble. It is used of men who are meek and lowly in character and who do not interfere with the affairs of other people. They are generally retiring and do not engage in quarrels and gossip.

Joseph was a righteous man. He did not want the people of the town to know that his wife, Mary, had conceived a child. He knew the people of the town would not believe Mary's story about the angel and would stone her in accordance with the law of Moses. She would have been made an example for other women of Nazareth and would have been stoned. Joseph tried to avoid this tragedy and began to find a way to divorce her secretly. He wanted to put her away quietly under some minor charge. In the east men often divorce their wives for no reason and no one has the slightest suspicion they are accused of adultery. The angel appeared to Joseph in a dream and told him the child was conceived by the Holy Spirit and he need not be alarmed. Joseph's mind was relieved. Now he believed his wife was sincere and her story of the angelic visitation true. He dropped the matter and the whole affair remained secret between them and the people of Nazareth knew nothing of what had taken place in Joseph's household. When Jesus was born, everybody believed he was Joseph's son; they could not have believed otherwise. This incident was made known only after the death of Joseph and Mary.



A VIRGIN

Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Matt. 1 : 23.

This verse is taken from Isaiah 7 : 14. The Hebrew text uses the word *alma* which means a young girl. The Aramaic word for a young girl is *alemta*. In Aramaic *alma* is a noun which means the world or the people. The eastern version reads *petolta* which means virgin. This word was doubtless changed when the Assyrians adopted Christianity. The Old Testament in Aramaic was written centuries before the Christian era. *Petolta* also means an unmarried woman who may be young or old. In this instance the Hebrew word *alma* is more accurate.

The prophet meant the Messiah would be conceived and born of a woman who is a virgin. It would be improper for a king to marry a widow because in such cases their sons could not ascend the throne.

When these words were spoken by the Prophet Isaiah, Palestine was invaded by the Assyrians and the ten tribes were carried into captivity. The kingdom of Judah was also threatened by this invasion and the countries around Jerusalem were devastated. Women were defiled by the invading forces. The prophet depicts a new picture with a brighter future for the restoration of Judah. The Assyrian and Babylonian empires would disappear and Israel would be restored to her former glory. Peace and prosperity would reign. There would be virgin girls in Israel. The nation would be again sanctified to God. A virgin would be the mother of the promised Messiah through whom a new kingdom without limits would be established.



THE MAGI

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem. Matt. 2 : 1.

The Aramaic word for Magi is *Magoshey*. Its root is derived from the Babylonian and Persian word *Magno*, meaning receptive. It is from this root that our words magnetic and magic are derived conveying the impression of greatness by means of wonders. The Magi, however, were not kings as usually pictured.

The Magi were Chaldean astrologers, soothsayers, fortune tellers, and sun worshippers. Being the great astronomers of their day, they studied the stars and planets in connection with their temple worship and as the result of their study, they were able to divide the years into months, weeks, and days.

Their religion demanded a thorough investigation of the whole universe and its celestial bodies. Their great prophet Zoroaster had predicted the coming of a famous prophet. Such predictions were based upon the appearance of new and unusual stars. The Magi had seen a strange star in their country and they saw it again when they were in Jerusalem. The appearance of this star at the time of the birth of Jesus was clearly a fulfilment of the Zoroastrian prophecy about the coming of a great Deliverer.



FOLLOWING THE STAR

When they had heard the king, they departed: and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. Matt. 2 : 9.

This is an Oriental saying meaning they followed in the direction of the star. In other words, they went and not the star.

Today the Arabs and other nomad tribes travel hundreds of miles in the expansive Arabian desert guided by stars. Shepherds understand the seasons of the year by the position of the stars and accordingly determine the changes of pasturage for their flocks and coming shortage of water. Caravan leaders also follow the routes by the direction of the stars. The native drivers of automobiles crossing the Arabian desert would find travel difficult without the help of the stars. A little error in direction, now as then, would mean the loss of a party or of a caravan in the desert because the desert is a level waste without well-defined routes. The imprints of camel hoofs and automobile tires are soon obliterated by shifting sand. There are no other signs upon which a traveler may depend for direction except the stars.

An Easterner giving directions to a stranger addresses him by saying, "Take that star in your hand until you come to the oasis. Then drop that star and take another in your hand until you reach your destination." This means follow straight in the direction of the first star until you reach the oasis, then take another route by looking at another star. Another saying like it is, "Take this road in your hand until you come to the town."

Easterners know little of the nature or size of the stars. The naked eye cannot reveal the immeasurable distances. Though they are familiar with the planetary movements they are ignorant of their orbits, form, and size and as the stars look small from the earth they believe they are small but powerful. The Hebrew prophets and learned men consider the stars simply as lamps hung in the sky for the sake of beauty and adornment and that stars and planets were created for the benefit of the earth. This ancient and curious opinion concerning stars is still prevalent. The learned Easterners who have not studied in European and American schools scorn the idea that the stars and planets are larger than the earth and that they are independent units. Neither do they believe that the earth turns. A few years ago at a conference of the Assyrian priests and tribal chiefs, gathered around their Patriarch, I asked the most learned priest how

large he believed the sun, moon and the stars were. The venerable priest's reply was prompt, simple and emphatic. He said the sun was as large as a watermelon and very powerful; an angel took care of it bringing it out in the early morning from heaven to lighten the earth and in the evening, he wrapped it up in a large handkerchief and put it in his pocket. The moon and stars were as large as apples. The priest was very indignant and he thought I was a heretic when I told him the sun was many times larger than the earth.

The science of astronomy was better developed among the Babylonians and Assyrians before the fall of their empires. It then began to decline and so continued until the first century A.D. and astronomy practically disappeared as a science and was supplanted by the superstitions of astrologers and soothsayers. With this awkward and limited knowledge of celestial bodies, it is no wonder the Magi were surprised to see the same star which they had seen in Mesopotamia, 400 miles away, standing over Bethlehem. They believed the star had either walked or disappeared and appeared again. Of course if the Magi had been in Cairo, they would have seen the same star there. Some Easterners believed a star seen from one city could not be seen from another.

Standing on the streets or housetops in Jerusalem and looking up at the stars in the direction of Bethlehem, the stars appear to be lower in the heavens than if looked upon from the plain because Jerusalem is built on the top of a mountainside and Bethlehem is in the valley. The stars appear to be standing over particular places in the town. When looking at the stars from a distance toward the horizon, they appear to be touching the ground. Moreover the mind of a traveler in the desert is often mystified.



NAZARETH

And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene. Matt. 2 : 23.

Nazareth is derived from the Hebrew and Aramaic word *Nazar* or *Nadar*, to take a vow. Nazareth might have been the home of the Nazarites who appeared from time to time in Israel. They were separated from the people and lived in seclusion. They did not shave or take strong drink. Nazareth is situated a few miles south of Cana at the northern end of the plains of Esdraelon. The name of this town is not mentioned in the Old Testament. It was probably built by refugees who were transported by King Sargon. (2 Kings 17 : 23.)

A NAZARENE

Nazarenes or Nazarites were dedicated to God before they were born. Childless women pledge to offer their first born to God as a Nazarene when their prayers are answered. This is how Samuel and Samson became Nazarites. (I Sam. 1 : 27 ; Judges 13 : 7.)

The Nazarites were different from other people as they lived simple lives. They were looked upon as men of God because they are dedicated to the work of God. The order of Nazarites is still preserved in the Assyrian Church. Bishops and other ecclesiastical authorities are all Nazarites. They do not shave or marry nor use strong drink. John 1 : 45.



GENERATION OF VIPERS

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?
Matt. 3 : 7.

The Eastern text more correctly reads, "O generation of scorpions". The reference to scorpion has to do with the birth of this insect. It is an Oriental belief when a scorpion is conceived, its father dies and when it is born, it eats its way out of the side of its mother causing her death. A scorpion thus comes into the world without father or mother to protect or guide it and it is exposed to danger from other hostile insects.

John the Baptist uses this illustration of a scorpion in asking the Pharisees and Sadducees "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come"? He implied, like the scorpion, they were spiritually orphans without any paternal guide. For a long period the Jewish nation had no prophets and seers to warn them against the inevitable judgment of God. Who then could have advised and warned these people and led them to the banks of the Jordan? It must have been the divine Spirit. John, therefore, insisted they should give proof of their sincerity before receiving baptism. The Jews knew about the impending judgment but they had not prepared themselves by repentance. The mere acknowledgment of a new prophet was not an adequate mark of repentance. They had to produce the good fruits of a genuine repentance and thus prove they were true sons of Abraham. Matt. 12 : 34; 23 : 33; Luke 3 : 7, 8, 9.



MIGHTIER THAN I

I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire:
Matt. 3 : 11.

When an Oriental prince or governor contemplates a long journey to visit his people, a high official accompanied by servants is sent out in advance to announce his coming lord and to make preparation for the proposed visit. The party is greeted and welcomed by the mayor and the citizens of the towns which are to be visited. In the Orient one bestows honor on a great man by honoring his servants and representatives. If any disrespect is shown, the mayor and his people may be punished and the visit to the town may be cancelled. The announcers of such royal visits are therefore greeted with a cordial welcome.

The townspeople, bestowing honor on the representative and his entourage, at times forget about the coming of the prince or governor. When the representative is treated with undue honor, he becomes uneasy and afraid lest his lord become jealous and displeased with such a reception given to him. Misunderstanding might occur and the kind remarks of the simple townfolk misinterpreted. Saul became jealous and began to hate David when the daughters of Israel sang, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1 Sam. 18 : 7). It was this that caused David to flee before Saul and become a wanderer for years. During such receptions some representatives resent remarks of praise made about them. They say, "I am nothing. I do not deserve what you say about me. I am only the messenger and one of the least of the servants of my lord. There is one who is coming after me. This honor is due only to him. I am not worthy even to untie the strings of his shoes."

John was the messenger of Christ and the announcer of his coming but the Jews mistook him for the Messiah. The people had waited patiently for the coming of a

great prophet as for many centuries there had been no prophet in Judea. John was therefore greeted as the Messiah because some people thought he was the Christ. When he appeared on the banks of the river Jordan, the people were so overwhelmed with joy they forgot there was another who was to follow him. John disclaimed the honor given to him and emphatically stated he was nothing but an agent of the great prophet and Saviour coming after him and whose shoes he was even unworthy to unloose. Luke 3 : 16.

REMOVING SHOES

The Eastern text more correctly reads, "Whose shoes I am not worthy to remove". This has the same meaning as "unloose" in Mark 1 : 7 and Luke 3 : 16.

Europeans and Americans take off their hats when entering a house but Orientals remove their shoes and retain their hats. It is the worst breach of Oriental etiquette to enter and sit in a house, wearing shoes. Friends and neighbors take off their own shoes and, in some instances, servants remove the shoes of their masters but when a distinguished guest or a stranger enters, the welcome is shown by the prompt removal of the shoes by a woman or servant of the house. If the guest is exceptionally distinguished, this is done by the master of the house himself. This practice of removing the shoes is a mark of respect and honor to the guest.

John the Baptist not only denied that he was the Christ but he also declared himself unworthy even to take off the shoes of Jesus. "I am not worthy to remove his shoes" is an Oriental expression signifying humility and submission. In thus speaking, John repudiated any claim to being the Messiah and announced himself only as the servant of the Messiah.



ROKHA, SPIRIT

Then was Jesus led up of the spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. Matt. 4 : 1.

The Aramaic word *rokha*, spirit, also means wind. Carried away by the spirit means "driven away by the spirit" or "moved away by a spiritual wind". Where Aramaic is spoken, it is often said "wind has entered into him, that is why he acts in this manner".

The Aramaic word *dnethnasey* means to try out. Men often try out their power and ability before they start a hard task. Oxen and horses are also tried out before they are bought and paid for.

Jesus had come to the conclusion he should proclaim himself the Messiah. There was considerable opposition from his friends and relatives but he finally decided to start on his mission. He was greatly encouraged by the reception the Jews had given John. Jesus could no longer wait in silence. He had to go into the desert in order to decide his future. He was filled with the Holy Spirit. The more he examined himself, the more he was encouraged in his decision to declare himself the Messiah for he felt that he would ultimately triumph regardless of any opposition. Mark 1 : 12; Luke 4 : 1.

WILDERNESS

Madbra "wilderness" is a wild, arid region without trees or inhabitants. In some parts, certain herbs grow during the spring season. The nomadic tribes who live in tents near the edges of the desert and at the oasis, use these areas for grazing. Even though the desert lacks trees, villages, and the attractions which make life happy and important in populous centers, it has its own natural majestic beauty. The celestial bodies pour on it their limitless light of majestic glory. The blue sky with its brilliant stars looks like a painted ceiling. It is in these beautiful spots that the Arabs and other Nomadic people live.

The beauty of the myriad stars, by their seeming closeness to the ground near the horizon, fascinates human imagination and reveals an order in the sky unexcelled by anything on earth. Living in these wide open desert spaces, one is impressed by the vastness of the heavens contrasted with the smallness of the earth and life is revealed in its proper proportion to the universe. Away from the material things of organized civilization, the dweller of the desert feels that God is near, God is everywhere. God is seen in the natural and mystical beauty and his presence is felt to a far greater extent here than by the inhabitants of the cities. Through this quickening by and feeling of the vastness of the heavens, God has been revealed in the three great religions of the world.

Col. Lawrence, famous British hero of Arabia, was impressed with the mystic life of the Arab and the Syrian people. He lived in obscurity, declining honors and decorations as a reward for his victories. His writings on Arab life are a revelation to the world.

"This square of land, as large as India, formed the homeland of our Semites, in which no foreign race have kept a permanent footing, though Egyptians, Hittites, Philistines, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Turks, and Franks had variously tried. All had in the end been broken, and their scattered elements drowned in the strong characteristics of the Semitic race."*

Jesus, just like the founders of other religions, spent considerable time meditating near the edge of this desert. He needed silence and quietness to overcome the temptations of physical forces which, unless conquered, deprive prophets and holy men of their fulfillment. The desert helps to reveal the inner life. The victories won are greater than temporal glory which fades like desert grass scorched by the sun. There was no place better than this wild country for Jesus to lay the foundation of a universal religion to serve mankind and to bring God closer to humanity.

*From page thirty-three, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* by T. E. Lawrence, Doubleday Doran, Garden City, New York.



FORTY

And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. Matt. 4 : 2.

Forty was a well known number and was regarded as a sacred number. Moses spent forty years in the wilderness of Midian. It took the Israelites forty years from the time they left Egypt until they arrived in Canaan. Moses and Elijah fasted forty days. Jesus also fasted forty days.

In many eastern countries, even today, fasting is a religious demand and is strictly observed. People fast from meat, butter and products of sheep. Some men fast from everything, eating only the evening meal, for a period of forty days. Mohammedans fast during the day and eat at night. Rich Mohammedans who are not willing to fast, hire the poor to do it for them.

Fasting was first instituted so the rich might have sympathy and understanding for the conditions of the poor. In the east when rich men fast they are very generous in their gifts to the poor because, during a season of fasting, they have a taste of poverty and hunger. Then again, fasting is a help in subjecting the body to the soul, the physical to the spiritual. Fasting reduces physical strength but increases spiritual forces and is an aid toward spiritual insight and character. Luke 4 : 2.



STONES INTO BREAD

And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. Matt. 4 : 3.

In eastern countries wheat is never bleached. The color of bread is brown and when baked the round loaves resemble stones. Hungry travelers often see these hot stones and wish they were bread.

A prophet is known by his miraculous works and by

his predictions which are fulfilled and not by his doctrines. No one can be accepted as a prophet without these extraordinary gifts. When Moses was asked to return to Egypt, he wanted a sign in order to test his own power as a prophet so he turned his staff into a serpent. In Egypt he did wonders which surpassed the works of great Egyptian magicians. Elijah performed miracles and was fed by a raven. Elisha had increased the flour and oil of the widow.

Jesus was tempted to test his power as a Messiah. He had to perform greater miracles than those of his predecessors because he was to enter upon the greatest mission ever undertaken by a representative of God. Jesus had faith in God, his father, and did not question his power.

Changing stones into bread would not help to soften the hearts of the people as God had worked many miracles among them before but they always forgot and went after other gods. Jesus depended on his heavenly Father for spiritual help and nourishment and not for material bread. Luke 4 : 3.



GALILEE OF THE GENTILES

The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles;
Matt. 4 : 15.

The word Galilee is derived from the Aramaic word *gal* to take captive; *galuthe* in Aramaic means captivity. In 721 B.C. Shalmanesar and his son Esarhaddon carried away the ten tribes into captivity and settled them in Assyria (2 Kings 17 : 23). Then they brought a large mixed Assyrian and Babylonian population to settle in Samaria and northern Israel. These new settlers spoke Aramaic, worshipped their own gods, practiced their own customs. They also accepted the God of Israel as their chief god because he was the god of the land where they were dwelling. The descendants of these early

settlers were called Galileans, that is, foreigners, by the Jews of the south. Although they worshipped the god of Israel, they still carried on some of their pagan practices. "They feared the Lord, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations whom they carried away from thence." (II Kings 17 : 33.) The Jews always despised them and looked on them as the descendants of the people who had conquered them and destroyed their country. They had nothing to do with them.

When the tribe of Judah returned from Babylon and the people began to build the temple and the wall of Jerusalem, the Galileans who were descendants of the early Assyrian settlers were living in the cities of Samaria and the north. They came down to Jerusalem and offered to share in the building of the temple and the restoration of the tribe of Judah. But Zerubbabel and other Jewish leaders rejected their offer on the ground they were foreigners and had no part in the ancestral inheritance. The Galileans gave reasons why their offer should be accepted and tried to prove they were Jews by faith although not Jews by blood. They stated that since the days when Assyrian kings brought their forefathers to settle in Galilee, they had been worshipping the God of Israel. The Jews insisted that even though they worshipped their God they could not be admitted to the Jewish race. (Ezra 4 : 2.) They are called "adversaries" in Ezra but this was probably a sentiment of Jewish prejudice.

The same question was raised during the time of Jesus. How could Christ come from Galilee, asked the Jews, when their scriptures declared the Christ would come from Bethlehem and the tribe of Judah? Seven hundred years had elapsed since the days of the captivity but the horrors of the Assyrian invasion were not forgotten by the Jews. They continued to regard Galileans as Gentiles and pagans and would not tolerate a prophet who came from that region. This racial hostility and hatred was intense in the days of Jesus. The Roman invasion had made the Jews feel bitter towards all foreigners especially towards foreign teachers of religion.

It was doubtless feared that such teaching might weaken Jewish faith on which rested their racial solidarity. Such racial feelings expressed through religion still prevail in the East. The Arabs believe that all Islamic holy men and leaders must be Arabs. No matter how qualified a Turkish Mohammedan may be in piety and learning, his authority as a religious leader would be questioned by the Arabs on racial grounds.



POOR IN PRIDE

Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matt. 5 : 3.

The Aramaic word *rokha* in this case means pride. Jesus was referring to those who were proud of their ancestry and social standing. Those who belonged to the nobility and the rich were reluctant to serve under others.

Easterners are always proud of their forefathers and race. Some people, even though poor and uncultured, are highly respected and honored because of their ancestry and are exempt from certain levies and burdens which others bear. Many people capitalize greatly on their ancestry. Some men would rather starve than do any manual labor because their ancestors were never employed in this type of work but were the employers and so their pride reduces them to poverty and destitution.

The Jews were proud of their ancestry. They were the children of Abraham, the founder of their race, and Abraham was a servant of the living God. Even when they were defeated and made captives, they looked down on their conquerors because they believed that Jehovah, their God, was the God of the world and that the gods of the other races were not gods. This race had gone through many hardships and changes and its racial glory had passed. For nearly 500 years, they were living under a foreign yoke and there was little hope for the restoration of Israel. The Pharisees, priests and scribes in order

to console their hearts dwelt a great deal on the glory of Israel in the early days. There was nothing to boast about but false racial pride. These men tried to make people believe they were too good to be ruled by foreigners, too holy to have any intercourse with other people, too proud to take orders from officials of other nations whose gods were inferior to the God of Israel.

Blessed are the poor in pride. Blessed are those who have no racial prejudice and are tolerant. Jesus knew that before the Jews could find peace, they must learn to be unassuming and meek. They had to be humble before they could expect toleration from their Gentile rulers. Luke 6 : 20.



THE MOURNERS

Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Matt. 5 : 4.

In countries where wars, revolutions and persecutions are frequent, mourning is common. One often sees women, hair cut, heads bowed down, dressed in black and men with heads covered with black cloth and their faces expressing deep sorrow. Even little children share in the unhappy events which constantly take place, bringing distress to their parents. Joy and laughter are seldom seen and heard in their homes.

Galilee was a center of insurrections. The Galileans were a warlike people. They were the descendants of Assyrians and had retained their tribal characteristics. They made repeated attempts to free Palestine from the Roman yoke but failed. The Jews in the south did not help. Judas, the Galilean, started a revolt and gallantly fought the Roman legionaries but he was defeated and met with death. (Acts. 5 : 37.) Pilate and Herod vehemently tried to stamp out these uprisings in order to win favors from the Roman emperor. Some Jewish leaders also betrayed their own people for special favors bestowed on them by Roman officials. Pilate had mingled

the blood of some Galileans with their sacrifices. The Galileans mourned the death of their heroes and beloved ones who lost their lives trying to free their country from alien rule.

In the new kingdom the subjects were to rule and the rulers to become subjects. Mourners were to be made happy. Their sorrow was to be changed into joy and the oppressors were to receive everlasting punishment.

These people came to Jesus and complained of the injustice and suffering which they were enduring. He cheered them. Blessed are those who mourn for they shall rejoice. They were soon to become the citizens of the new kingdom. Joy and happiness awaited them. Luke 6 : 21; John 16 : 20.



THE MEEK

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.
Matt. 5 : 5.

This beatitude is an Oriental proverb still commonly used. It refers to the type of man who does not retaliate and who is free from that grasping temper which leads to disputes and quarrels often ending in bloodshed and murder. Such men believe in nonresistance and submit to injustice even at great inconvenience. They seldom protest to the rulers of the earth but in their supplications, they always remind God of their heavy burdens. They are at last rewarded for their oppressors and persecutors generally perish in wars and revolutions.

It is still customary in the East when a man dies or is killed in war, leaving no male heir, his land is turned over to the meritorious meek. Landlords furthermore invariably prefer to lease their vineyards and farms to men of character who are responsible and reliable. The meek are thus ultimately blessed and rise in power and prosperity.

Jesus knew of cases where revolutionary Galileans were executed by the Romans, their property confiscated

and given to men who were not suspected of sedition. He here stresses the quality of meekness which brings contentment and satisfaction as against the spirit of chronic restlessness which causes disturbances and violations of law.



SATISFACTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Matt. 5 : 6.

In most Eastern countries people are misruled by their governments. Exploitation of the poor and injustice prevail everywhere. Heavy taxes and extortion by government officials make people hunger for righteousness. To console themselves they dream of kind kings and honest officials to supplant their harsh rulers.

Judges and other government officials do not judge people by what they have done but according to what they have and the class to which they belong. The poor are thus crushed by the unjust and their property is often confiscated.

These men, tired of their governments, become indifferent and lose interest in political parties and reformers and continually pray for the establishment of God's rule on the earth.



LIGHT

Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Matt. 5 : 15.

Oil lamps and electricity are unknown in the East. An Oriental house is either lighted by a candle made of wax or by an earthen lamp about three inches in diameter, filled with butter, and having a cotton wick in it to burn.

An Eastern house is a square building large enough to hold between forty and fifty people. The house has as many candles or lamps as the number of the families dwelling in it. Some houses have from three to seven families, chiefly relatives, but occasionally strangers. Each family has a portion of the house and its own lamp. It is set on a lamp holder fastened to a pillar and gives light to the family. It also throws some light on the other parts of the house. Poor families who have no butter, cannot light their lamps and depend upon their neighbor's lamp. They sit in the dark waiting for another family to come in and light a lamp.

When peace reigns in a house in the East, one family gladly shares the light of their lamp with the others. Some women however are very selfish and greedy. They hate to see their light shining on others because they feel that their neighbors are saving their butter. Also, quarrels among women are very frequent and the family relations become strained. On such occasions the position of the lamp is changed. It is placed on the opposite side of the post or a shade is placed against it, so that the family with whom relations are broken cannot get the benefit of the light. This is not always easy and sometimes when the position of the lamp is changed, it does not give sufficient light to its owners.

The Jewish race was the lamp. The Gentiles were their neighbors living in the same country but they had no oil. Their pagan religions had no light so at times they depended for light upon the Jewish Scriptures and laws. Indeed, they looked up to the Jewish people as examples of correct morality. The Jews were the people of God, living amidst races who had no knowledge of God and were in darkness. But the Jews always jealously guarded their faith and prevented their light from shining on their neighbors. They were unwilling to share their religion and happiness with their neighbors. They would rather bury it and even deprive themselves of its benefits than share it with the Gentiles.

God had made the Jews as a candle, not to shine on themselves alone but to shine on other people also bring-

ing them the knowledge of God. This they refused to do so while cutting their light from the Gentiles, they also sat in darkness.

Satisfaction and happiness come only to those who render service to others. Kindness and generosity are appreciated more by those who receive than by those who give. Our gifts are not for ourselves but for the world at large. When we jealously guard and bury the gifts which are entrusted to us, we lose them. They are of no benefit to us or to others. Mark 4 : 21; Luke 8 : 16; 11 : 33.



WEAKENING THE LAW

Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.

Matt. 5 : 17.

The Eastern text reads "Do not expect that I have come to weaken the law or the prophets; I have not come to weaken but to fulfill". The Aramaic word *nishrey* means to untie, to loose, to weaken. When a new government is established the new officials give assurances that the laws will be made easier and the tax burdens reduced. Old and established laws are often undermined by lax interpretations to carry out the policies of the new government.

Founders of new religions generally condemn or disparage the principles and practices of established faiths. Exacting ceremonies and religious demands are abolished or modified so as to gain the favor and support of the people. No movement, religious or political, could be started or be successful without some criticisms of the old systems.

Jesus was a new prophet. His teaching deviated from that of the recognized leaders of his day. The Jews charged him with organizing a different faith. In their eyes his teaching was undermining the influence of the

law and the prophets and his refusal to comply with the customs and traditions of the elders exposed him as a heretic. Jesus emphatically denied this, explaining his mission was rather to strengthen the law and fulfill it; that is, make it perfect. The law was read and respected by the Jews but it was not practiced by them. Jesus actually put it into practice and realized its deepest purposes.



RACA

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Matt. 5 : 22.

R*aka* is a noun derived from the Aramaic word *rak* to spit. This word was not translated into Greek. Perhaps the translator could not find a similar habit of spitting among Greek people as among Semites or he may not have known the meaning of the word.

During heated arguments and controversies, easterners often spit in each other's face. Merchants and prospective customers, after long bargaining and arguments concerning price, spit in each other's face when they fail to agree. Nearly all quarrels are started by spitting. One often says *raka arek na bapek*, I will spit in your face. Spitting is the most contemptible thing in the east and is still practised in Egypt, Syria and Palestine. Not even priests and rabbis are free from this insulting habit. It may be interesting to know that a sect of devil worshippers near Mosul, Mesopotamia, prohibit spitting under any circumstances. This is a protest by them against people of other religions who spit in each other's face and when they make a mistake spit on the devil saying, *po elek satana*, I spit on Satan.



THOU FOOL

But whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Matt. 5 : 22.

The Aramaic word *lella* means nurse maid. The Aramaic word for fool is *sakhla* and it is commonly used without any implication of insult (See Matt. 7 : 26; 1 Cor. 15 : 36). Brothers often call each other *sakhla* without thought of offending them. On the other hand, to call any one *lella* is worse than an insult because it reflects on the character of the person so called.

The term *lella* is generally given to men who are effeminate or who perform the duties of a woman such as cooking, knitting and taking care of children. Most Eastern fathers would consider it a disgrace to mind the children in the absence of their wives. At such times they call on their women neighbors to help them. Easterners generally call a coward a woman because women do not fight and the term *lella* thus also means a coward which no full-blooded Easterner would tolerate.



RECONCILE YOUR BROTHER

Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. Matt. 5 : 23, 24.

Quarrels and disputes are common between brothers because they live in the same house. These disturbances are often caused by their wives and servants. When they separate and live apart, further troubles arise because of property division. Reconciliation and peace become impossible. At times two brothers living under the same roof never speak to each other.

The word brother in this instance also means neighbor or a member of the same race or faith as is seen in the

book of Deuteronomy. Reconciliation between brothers and neighbors generally takes place during the feasts and holy days. A few days before the feast a group of townspeople, known as peacemakers, begin making peace between quarreling parties. They settle the differences, divide the properties and urge them to forgive each other and make peace.

When efforts of peacemakers fail, the final hope for peace is placed on the words of the priest which will be uttered during the services on the holy day. On such occasions the priest reads absolution and prays to God asking forgiveness for his people. He then asks the people to forgive each other in order that they may receive forgiveness from God. This is done before giving the Holy Communion. Communicants who have not been on good terms rush to kiss each other. If the priest discovers that certain brothers or neighbors have not agreed, he refuses to give them Communion. Some men, before the conclusion of the service, go out of the church to find their adversaries to make peace and kiss them so they may return and participate in the Communion.

Our Lord commands that one should leave even his most sacred gift on the altar and go in search of his enemy and make peace with him. Love and peace are greater than all temples and sacrifices because God is love and no love can be realized without peace. Man can not be reconciled with God unless he first makes peace with his brother and neighbors.



SETTLING WITH ADVERSARY

Agree with thine adversary quickly, whiles thou art in the way with him; lest at any time the adversary deliver thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. Matt. 5 : 25.

In most parts of the Orient there are few courts and judges. One reason for this is that most Orientals prefer to settle their differences by arbitration or

through peacemakers who are chiefly bishops and priests. When such efforts fail they turn to government officials and justices of peace who are stationed at the capitals of provinces or at some distant points. In such cases men have to make long journeys to seek justice. In olden times prophets and men of God were the arbitrators, peacemakers and judges who looked after the political and spiritual welfare of the people. Samuel was one of these judges to whom all Israel came. (I Sam. 7 : 15.)

Even today in most countries of the East, the disputants journey for two, three or more days in search of justice. In many instances the parties concerned travel together, stop at the same inn, eat and converse during the journey. They have fought or perhaps wounded each other but on the long journey to the place of justice, they have to be friendly. They might meet bandits on the road who could rob and kill them. They have to protect and fight for each other. Often on the weary and tiresome journey their troubles and differences are forgotten. Friendly conversations take the place of hatred; gracious words are spoken instead of cursing; love and sympathy dominate.

Thus while on the road to the judge, men who have been enemies for months suddenly become friends. They talk over their differences and suggest remedies. Such attempts and discussions would have been impossible if the men were at home because friends and enemies would have interfered and prevented a reconciliation. But on the tedious journey they have time to think things over and are free to make agreements and settlements without outside interference. Questions which were difficult to settle at home now seem to be easy. Each man makes apologies to the other, admitting his ignorance of facts or blaming others for the quarrel. So while they walk together on the road, they enter into friendly relations and differences are finally settled to the advantage of both. In addition they avoid the loss of time and expense necessary to present the cases before the officials of justice.

Two men may start on a five day journey to the judge

and unexpectedly return home on the first or second day. On their arrival in the town, one would kill a sheep and give a banquet in honor of the other, inviting friends to share in the joy of reconciliation without having to go before the judge. At the banquet the two men each assert the blame was his own.

If, however, neither of the two men on such a journey was willing to yield a point, both would have to face the judge and experience many discomforts. Oriental judges generally have few cases during the year and as their support is derived from complainants, they are like spiders patiently waiting for victims to fall in their web. A trifling affair is made into a big case requiring months and years to settle. In the East justice is often executed not according to guilt but wealth. If both the disputants are poor, the case is promptly dismissed with a few rebukes but if they happen to have money or other wealth, the case may never be settled until the last cent is gone and the property sold. Some judges are so cruel and unjust that in order to get money more quickly from disputing parties, they immediately put them in prison. Relatives and friends are instructed to sell their properties to pay enormous bribes and meet other expenses, hoping to gain the liberty of the imprisoned. Freedom only comes when the judge is assured there is nothing left to be sold and the prison cell has to be occupied by another unfortunate man.

Jesus had seen many men lose their property and receive severe punishment for little differences which could have been easily settled by the men themselves or by a friend in the village. He referred to the earthly judgment to illustrate the final judgment. He urged men and women to repent while on the road of this life so as not to be brought before the bar of final judgment and suffer eternal punishment. Luke 12 : 58.



LOOKING AT A WOMAN

But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.
Matt. 5 : 28.

Eastern women have always covered the face with a veil and resent being seen by strange men. Some women are even shy in the presence of their own husbands if they do not have a veil. It would be a disgrace for a woman to dress or undress before her husband or to have any part of her body seen by a stranger. Even in hot weather men and women have separate bathing places. Then too, men and women seldom meet each other socially. Woman is therefore a mystery to man and it is on this account that an Eastern man tries to see a woman secretly. To look at a woman does not mean to look at her face but at her body.

Eastern houses are built close to each other and are separated by walls. Women bathe in the house or courtyard and there is little chance for privacy. It often happens that when women bathe, men hide themselves on the housetops and other places so as to look at the women. This is how David saw Bathsheba from the roof of his palace. He coveted her and had her husband Uriah killed so that he could make her his wife. (2 Sam. 11 : 2.) It is this kind of looking at a woman which Jesus condemns.



PLUCKING OUT THE EYE

And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.
Matt. 5 : 29.

The eye is the symbol of desire and envy. It is the unspoken but understood language of the East. The eye with its varying shades of light gives expression to

the countenance, which in turn is influenced by the heart. This language of the eye is a fearful menace to superstitious Orientals.

One often hears it said in the Orient "Cut your eye from my boy", which means "do not envy my boy"; or "Do not cut your eye from my family while I am away", which means "Look after their best interests in my absence." In the Western world the expression "Have an eye on him" means take care of him or look out for him.

When sheep or cattle die in the Orient, their owner would at times blame his neighbor whose evil eye had brought the misfortune. If a woman with the reputation of having an evil eye enters a home where there is a handsome lad, his mother would smear his face with charcoal to avoid the spell of that woman's eye. This is one reason why the faces of children are seldom washed. In the Orient "safety first" is more important than sanitation.

The counsel of Jesus is to pluck out the eye of lust, covetousness, envy, and greed, so that the life might be clean and wholesome. It is better to lose these things than to acquire habits which would ultimately destroy the whole life.



CUT YOUR HAND

And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. Matt. 5 : 30.

Cut off your hand" is an Aramaic saying which is used in conversation but with no reference to actually cutting off one's hand. People often say to each other, "Cut off your hand from my vineyard" which means do not gather grapes from my vineyard. "His hand is too long" means, he is a thief. "Shorten your hand" means, do not steal. Again "Cut your hand" means, cut out a bad habit. The hand is mentioned because it is the agent by which the mind and body do their work.

"Better enter with one hand and one foot" is figurative speech which implies that the evil done by the act of hand and foot is greater than the loss of the hand and foot. The public understood these terms. The Galileans who spoke northern Aramaic were neither puzzled by these remarks which sound so harsh nor did they require explanations because these terms were of current usage. They are still current in Oriental speech and are the commonplaces of Oriental thought.



DIVORCE

It hath been said, Whosoever shall put away his wife, let him give her a writing of divorcement:

But I say unto you, That whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery: and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery. Matt. 5 : 31-32.

Civil marriages are neither recognized nor practised in the East. The payment of dowry and the blessings pronounced by a priest are the only sacred bonds between a man and his wife.

At times it takes from three to seven days to arrange a marriage and the wedding feast but it takes only a few minutes for a man to divorce his wife. Marriage is considered by nearly all Easterners as a sacred institution. It must, therefore, not be mixed up with politics or courts as is the case in other countries. Eastern women look upon marriage as a lottery and are resigned to their fate. Their consent is not regarded when given in marriage. Consequently they have nothing to say when the divorce question arises. The sole authority is invested in the man who exercises unlimited power over his wife or wives.

The ancient Christians who still adhere to the Mosaic Code are the oldest branch of the Semitic (Assyrian) race. Divorces among them are very rare and the attitude of the men toward their wives is quite different from that of other neighboring races. They are more tolerant and, to some degree, their women exercise a cer-

tain freedom equal to Western women. No doubt this change took place when Christianity was adopted as the religion of the country. It is very important to know that the Eastern text in reference to this verse uses two Aramaic words whereas Western texts use only one. One word is *nishbook* which means to leave, and the other is *nishry* which means to divorce. At the present day, if a man marries a woman who is left, both man and woman are excommunicated from the church. But if a woman who has been left by her husband obtains a decree of *shiriana*, divorce, which means the loosening of the bond, she is allowed to marry again and the marriage is lawful.

A clearer understanding concerning the divorce question can be gained by studying the divorce customs among non-Christian Semites such as the Jews in Mesopotamia and Persia, the Arabians, and the non-Semitic races who are influenced by Semitic religion and culture as the Kurds and Persians. They are still fully governed by the ancient Biblical law. Some of these peoples divorce their wives for no criminal or moral reason but for other causes which are regarded as justifying divorce. Among these causes are not bearing children, not working hard, not having found favor in a husband's eyes, looking at other men. If any interference should come from religious authorities, a small bribe of a lamb, a chicken, or two pounds of sugar, would be sufficient to appease these authorities and obtain their consent. For unknown ages, Eastern women have been degraded and regarded as man's property, at times even bought and sold in open markets. Divorces are so easy and frequent that religious laws have been instituted to remedy the situation. Laws have been enacted providing that if a man puts away his wife for no reason and then regrets it and desires to take her back, the woman shall first marry another man for two or three months and then get a decree of divorce before she remarries her first husband. Of course this is very humiliating and, too, the people have found how to get around the law. For example, in Kurdistan, if a Kurd should divorce his wife

for no cause and later desires to remarry her, the woman is betrothed and married to a male goat or an ox. After marriage, the animal is killed and the woman becomes a widow. When her mourning days are fulfilled, her first husband may remarry her.

In this case Jesus condemned the laxity of the law and tried to strengthen it. He did not try to change the Mosaic law which allows divorces based on grounds of adultery. But he did condemn the abandonment of wives by their husbands in arbitrary ways. Jesus saw women humbled and mistreated by their husbands and laden with heavy burdens. He knew women were human beings, the equal of men, and their task in life a very important one. He said: "A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave only to his wife and they shall be one flesh". Jesus was the first prophet to champion the rights of women and to give them equality with men. That is why women of all countries and creeds admire and honor him. Matt 19 : 3; Mark 10 : 2; Luke 16 : 18.



"YES, YES; NO, NO"

*But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay:
for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.*

Matt. 5 : 37.

As fixed prices are unknown in the East, buying and selling is a complicated business. Each merchant has his own prices and quotes them to each customer as he pleases. The customer is afraid of being cheated and has his own idea of the price. This makes business burdensome. For instance, if one decides to buy a pair of shoes or a garment, it means a day's work and much exhaustion because of mistrust and incessant bargaining before making the purchase.

When the price cannot be settled by bargaining, merchants and their customers generally take oaths by temples and holy names in proof of their sincerity. They take an oath saying, "By God's name and his holy angels,

this pair of shoes cost me six dollars but you can have it for three dollars". When such oaths are ineffective then they resort to swearing. Thus, "If I lie to you I am the son of a dog or an ass, the shoes cost me three dollars but I will let you have them for a dollar and a half". To all of this the suspecting customer replies, "By my only son's head, I will not pay you more than a dollar". If this fails the merchant is apt to spit in the face of the customer.

Instead of this conventional cross play, waste of time and temper, Jesus here insists on directness and frankness in dealing with one another. He knew that when a man is cheated he would try to cheat others, and if one is deceived by oaths uttered on sacred names he would likewise do the same in transactions with others. "Yes, yes" and "No, no" is the only successful and straightforward method in business. The Orient is only now learning that such a method is far superior to their traditional system.



NONRESISTANCE

But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.
Matt. 5 : 39.

The term evil here means injustice. In the east people are forced to do hard labor. Those in power generally oppress the poor. Property is confiscated unjustly. Resistance in such cases generally results in heavier burdens, violence and even murder. Nonresistance is the only weapon with which the poor can defend themselves. Politicians, government officials and rich men are always friendly and kind toward those who willingly carry their burdens without complaining. On the other hand, those who offer resistance are treated as rebels and made to pay heavy penalties. The reference here is probably to government officials and soldiers who misuse their authority but against whom resistance is futile. This

counsel did not refer to resisting attacks made by bandits and murderers. Luke 6 : 29.



COAT AND CLOAK

And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. Matt. 5 : 40.

Petty bandits and robbers generally take by force the victim's garments and shoes. Clothes are also stolen from homes and the fields. When a man is taken to court under suspicion his good upper garments are taken from him as a bond. Innocent men are often mistaken for bandits and taken before government officials. If found guilty and they have no money, they are stripped of their clothes.

Clothes are also accepted as security for loans. When people fail to pay their loans the creditors are willing to accept the garments in lieu of payment.

If a man should resist giving his robe, he will be forced not only to give it but his other clothing will also be confiscated and, in addition, he will be punished. But, a man will not be naked if he gives his shirt and robe because Easterners wear many shirts and robes, one upon another, in summer and winter alike. A man generally wears all the garments he has because in the East his social standing is determined by the number of clothes he wears.



OBEYING ORDERS

And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain. Matt. 5 : 41.

I n most Eastern countries, railroads and other modern forms of transportation are still unknown. Merchandise, food supplies, and building materials are carried on the backs of animals and men. In some isolated regions

of the country, roads are so narrow and difficult the entire transportation is accomplished by men. Where animals of burden are scarce, men and women carry wheat on their backs for twenty, thirty miles or more. During the cold winter months, in some sections, the backs of men is the only method of transportation.

In times of war or peace, when companies or regiments of the army are transferred from one place to another, both men and animals are drafted into service for the transportation of military supplies. If roads are inaccessible for animals, men do it all. This work is evenly divided by the army officers among the people of the various towns on the route to destination. That is to say, the people of one town carry the burden as far as the next town. They are notified in advance to be ready. On some occasions the journey is not more than one or two miles. Those who gladly respond to the summons and willingly take up the burdens are released as soon as the next town is reached and new men drafted into service, but those who fail to report in due time or those who resist are compelled by the officers, as punishment, to go a journey of two or three days instead of a mile. Gentle and humble men, approached by harsh officers and asked to go one mile, generally reply "I shall be glad to go two miles, my Lord." The officer's heart softens and these men are assigned light burdens and are released as soon as possible. Rough men who resist the performance of these duties are beaten severely and given heavy burdens to carry.

Jesus had watched Roman army officers recruiting men to carry food and military supplies during the revolutions and wars in Syria, Palestine and Persia. It is quite probable that he had submissively obeyed the law of the princes of this world and because of his readiness and willingness, he was doubtless given the lighter burden and shorter mileage. In the eyes of Jesus, non-resistance was the only weapon with which to combat the forces of this world. Meekness and gentleness were ultimately to bring happiness and peace.



PERFECTION

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. Matt. 5 : 48.

The Aramaic word *gmera* means perfect, comprehensive, complete, thorough and finished. In this verse it does not mean perfect in character as God is perfect but perfect or complete in understanding. Jesus knew that no one could be perfect like God. A learned man is called *gmera biolpana*, which means that he is acquainted with every branch of learning. *Gmera bnamosa* means one who is well versed in the law. Also, when a young man reaches the age of maturity he is known as *gmera* which means that he has become a man of understanding.

Jesus wanted his disciples to have a complete understanding of the things which they were to face in their great mission. They were to be wise, pure, alert, gentle and brave. They had to possess all qualities which make for success and greatness.



SECRET PRAYERS

That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. Matt. 6 : 4.

Semites always look on God as a spirit who can not be seen by mortal eyes. This spirit knows neither time nor space and is omnipotent. His power and presence are felt everywhere. Moses covered his face when he talked with God. Elijah heard his voice in the fire. In the course of time God was localised and could be reached only in certain sacred places in the cities or the shrines erected in the high places.

Easterners generally pray publicly. Some pray near a brook of water, some stand near a mosque or church wall, others pray in the churches during the hour of prayer. There are those who pray secretly in a little room

apart or in a corner of the house. They kneel down and during their supplications mutter words as if they were conversing with God. Other men pray in their hearts. They believe God hears their unuttered prayers.

Every easterner believes God is present wherever he prays and even though he does not see God, God sees him. They also believe the spirits of departed men are around them. During prayers, they petition God for things they need. They believe, if the petitioner is sincere, the things he asks for will be granted and the grants will be made secretly. Pharisees and priests who were professionals prayed in public so as to be seen by the people and be considered righteous. They received only the people's praise as their reward and not the blessing of God. Jesus detested this kind of prayer because it was insincere.



CLOSET

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. Matt. 6 : 6.

Houses in the east have a small adjoining room known as a closet where family supplies and valuables are kept. The closet is connected with the house by a small door constructed in the wall. As many families live in the same house, there is no privacy. People dress and undress with no curtains around them. While some are sleeping, others are dressing. While some are saying prayers, others are drinking and singing. A minister may be saying grace or performing a religious ceremony while men and women in another part of the house are shouting curses at each other. Some men prefer to pray outside on the roof but this also is a thoroughfare and playground; others seek a brook for quietness. The people who pray just to be seen by their neighbors and strangers stand in places where they are conspicuous. Easterners have no prayer books and recite their prayers from

memory. They stand up, their lips move rapidly and their mumbling utterances are indistinctly heard. In the market places the shop keepers pray in their tiny shops. They place their coats under their knees, at times rising to praise God, then kneeling again to pray.

Jesus despised this form of prayer because these men were doing it to be seen and they were getting their reward because people thought they were religious and honest. Jesus wanted them to enter the little closet where they could not either be seen or be disturbed and where their prayers could be offered in secret to the Father who sees in secret and rewards openly.



PRAYER

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Matt. 6 : 7.

The Aramaic word for prayer is *slotha* which also means adjustment. It is derived from the word *sla* meaning to array or to set a trap. In the East hunters set wooden traps and retire from the scene to a secret place until the animal is caught. The whole process requires patience, quietness and watchfulness. All this is true of prayer.

Prayer is neither a reminder to God of what we need, as though he had forgotten us, nor is it a formal act of mere outward reverence to impress God by a ceremony. It is really an attitude of spirit to prepare us for what we need and to qualify us to receive what God has provided and also to express our gratitude to him for his goodness.

Prayers are often not answered because the suppliant is unworthy of what he asks or is not ready to receive and use its benefits. Some prayers are ignored by God because answers to them would be injurious to us.



DAILY BREAD

Give us this day our daily bread.

Matt. 6 : 11.

The Aramaic word *lakhma*, bread, does not mean bread alone but food. In an Eastern home no meal is complete without bread and no one would attempt to entertain without bread even though other food was abundant. When a man invites a stranger to eat, he says to him "Come, eat bread with me" which means, come to dine with me.

Wheat is the staple food supply. It is carefully stored for lean years. People live in fear of bad days. No matter how abundantly they are supplied, they always predict famine and hardships. This fear causes such a troubled state of mind that people lose faith in God, their Father, who meets the needs of his children. They begin to think either God's power is limited or he has forgotten them during their misfortune, not recognizing that misfortune is often caused by greed and conflicts.

"Give us our daily bread" does not mean God has forgotten to supply this urgent need, but that we should be satisfied with supplies from day to day. That is to say, if God can meet these needs every day, why should we store our food supplies and create fear of depression. Jesus knew that God always meets these needs just as a father meets the needs of his children. He reminds us of the abundant love of the heavenly Father who is more concerned about his children than any human father.



LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen.

Matt. 6 : 13.

This phrase in Aramaic means "do not let us enter into temptation." Aramaic speaking people often say, "do not let us be in need," "prevent me from making a

mistake." When a husband goes on a journey, his wife's last remark to him is "do not leave us in want." The Aramaic word *nesiona* refers to luxurious or worldly living. It does not mean God would lead us into such a life. For instance Judas, when he sold his Master, was tempted by the love of money and not by God. God leads no one into temptation. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil neither tempteth he any man:" (James 1 : 14). He guides those who look to him for wisdom and helps to overcome the evil of material life. The Aramaic word *pasan* here more correctly means "part us from evil things" and not "deliver us." God has authority over the universe and we are under God's power.



TREASURE

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal:
Matt. 6 : 19.

Banks and safe deposits are unknown in most Eastern countries. Coins of silver and gold and other valuable articles are buried in the ground to keep them safe from bandits and robbers. Costly garments and perishable goods are hidden in secret vaults constructed in the walls. They may escape being stolen but are frequently exposed to destruction by rust and moths because the earth is invariably damp and houses infested with insects.

Easterners generally hope that some day they may discover hidden treasures. Therefore, when they plow or dig foundations for buildings, they always expect to strike a treasure. When it is discovered, it becomes the property of the finder no matter to whom it belongs. As treasures are buried secretly at night, the identity of the owners is unknown. Moreover, the owners always deny they possess any treasure to avoid lending money to people and to escape the payment of unjust taxes.

The place where money is buried is only known to the

person who buried it. If he happens to die, the treasure is virtually lost to the family and, according to an unwritten law, it becomes the property of any finder. Some treasures are found which were buried centuries ago and coins are dug up which belong to dynasties long vanished. Where the coins are very old and have no exchange, they are reburied or melted secretly for jewelry. If a man happens to find a treasure in his neighbor's field, he hastens to buy the field in order to get possession of the treasure. In any case, if known, the treasure would be confiscated by the government and the finder fined or imprisoned.

While some men secretly bury their money, others openly search for it. The treasure owner is always worried about his money, afraid lest some one discover it. His thoughts and happiness are buried with his treasure. Mark 10 : 21; Luke 12 : 34.



TWO MASTERS

No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.
Matt. 6 : 24.

There is nothing which a servant in the East hates worse than working for two brothers. Some servants prefer unemployment to the responsibility of working for two masters.

In the East, family ties remain unbroken even after the death of father and mother. Brothers, their wives and sisters live in the same house; they work, eat together from the same dish, and their property is undivided. The brothers are generally at peace until disturbed by quarrels of their wives and children. The wives, when not working hard, usually indulge in gossip. This often results in strained relations which weaken the unity of the family. The brothers become bitter towards each other because they take sides with their wives and children. Domestic troubles are also often caused by discrimination

in the distribution of food and clothing as well as by jealousies and suspicions.

Under such circumstances the task of servants becomes confusing and difficult. What one wife orders the other wife indignantly forbids. If any courtesy or preference is shown for one side of the family, the other side is angry. Experienced servants are aware of this. They know Eastern women living in the same house and under the same roof generally quarrel and are seldom at peace. The servants study the situation and soon learn to know which side to love and which to hate. They become attached to the brother whose wife is gentle and kind and from whom they expect better treatment. This is very important for a servant because women give them their portion of food. Some servants side with the elder brother and his wife and hate the younger. The more a servant loves one side of the family the more he hates the other side. Shrewd servants do their best to pretend they love both families.

Just as a man cannot work and please two masters, even though they are brothers, so he cannot serve God and worldly riches and pleasures. He must either love God or love the world, or deceive himself by pretending to love both. The Pharisees and priests were scrupulous about their religion and its sacred laws but they were also lovers of gold, silver, animal sacrifices and other revenues which they derived from people in the name of God. They were in reality worshipping earthly things and religion was only a camouflage. Temple treasures and profits were more important and sacred to them than the worship of God. Luke 16 : 13.



THE GRASS AND THE OVEN

Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?

Matt. 6 : 30.

In Aramaic and Hebrew the word for oven or fireplace is *tanura*, taken from two words *tan*, place, and *nura*, fire. An oven is a large, deep, round hole dug in the center of the house. It is about three feet in diameter, five feet deep and is lined with baked clay. An air passage, about five or six feet away, is constructed underground and connected at the bottom of the oven to keep the fire burning. Some Eastern houses contain as many ovens as the number of families living in them.

The *tanura* or oven, is used for cooking, baking bread and heating the house. It is heated with grass and manure which the women gather from the fields. When the oven is lighted, dry grass is steadily added until the inside of the oven is well heated and turns white. Pots containing the family food are then lowered with iron hooks into the oven. The dough is rolled until it becomes thin like cardboard and is clapped on the smooth clay inside the oven. When cooking and baking are finished, a large wooden cover is placed over the oven so the children will not fall into it. A hot, burning oven is a frightful place. When mothers scold their children and try to frighten them, they tell them they will throw them into the oven. In the East, an oven is the nearest illustration of hell fire.

It is to this grass which the women gather in the fields and with which they kindle the fire that Jesus refers. *Tanura* is the red hot place often mentioned in the Scriptures. This is the fiery furnace, into which Nebuchadnezzar commanded Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to be thrown. (Daniel 3 : 19). It is also the kind of oven into which the frogs entered during the Egyptian plague. (Exodus 8 : 3). Even grass which is one of the least important of God's creations is grown under God's care

and clothed with beauty. How much more important is man who is God's image and likeness? If God cares for the grass which today is and tomorrow is used to heat an oven, how much more does he care for his own children for whose benefit grass, flowers, and birds are created?



WORLDLY PEOPLE

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?

(For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. Matt. 6 : 32.

The Eastern text reads *ammey*, which means worldly people. It refers to those who have no regard for religion and holiness, and who value the pleasures of this life above spiritual things. The reference is both to Gentiles and Jews, regardless of nationality and religion. The Jews also sought material possession and other comforts of life, because they believed that life consisted of treasures, luxuries and power. They were not concerned with justice and mercy and took little thought of the life hereafter and its rewards.

This was a warning to the disciples that mere material gains were pursued by worldly people, but that they should seek after the spiritual things of life. Such a life would not be easy but filled with difficulties and struggles. They would be hungry, thirsty, and at times, even persecuted. They were not to expect material advantages by preaching a spiritual gospel. The two would not go together. If they were to preach poverty they must be poor themselves. They could not denounce riches and accumulate them at the same time. They must seek first the kingdom of God and their daily needs would be supplied.



CRITICISM

*Judge not, that ye be not judged.
For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged:
and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to
you again.* Matt. 7 : 1, 2.

Judge not" does not mean that men should not become judges or justices of peace. It means that we are not to judge the habits, weaknesses and actions of others because we also may have similar or worse shortcomings and defects which we fail to see but which are seen by others. What Jesus censures here is the gossip, criticism and slander of others resulting in quarrels.

In the east, books, newspapers, theaters and other means of entertainment are unknown, and as there is little work to be done, people spend time gossiping and criticizing each other. Every move and action of others is watched and criticized. Some men point out the physical defects of others and criticize their looks and habits but forget they themselves have even greater defects.

We often condemn others of practices of which we ourselves are guilty. No man therefore has any right to judge others for this is the prerogative of God alone who is perfect and whose judgment is true. Luke 6 : 37.



PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

*Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast
ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under
their feet, and turn again and rend you.* Matt. 7 : 6.

Swine are an abomination to members of some religions in the East. Dogs are pronounced as unclean by all Easterners. Today Mohammedans and Jews do not eat pork and both hate dogs.

In the Orient the less a wise man speaks the more he is honored by the people and his fame spreads. The wise

man generally converses with the people of his own class and resents answering the questions of men who are not his equal. Some learned men avoid the discussion of deep subjects in the presence of uncultured people. They would rather sit quiet and listen to the foolish talk than say something which will not be understood by the audience. During such debates when theological and philosophical questions are discussed, heated and bitter words are exchanged. In the East no one is willing to admit he is wrong. When one argues with a learned man and fails to defend his position, he attacks him in order to avenge his honor. Wise men, however, are generally tolerant towards each other, and when wrong, they accept the verdict.

Jesus warned his disciples not to discuss theology and philosophy with ignorant men because they would not understand; and misunderstanding would cause dispute and culminate in a fight and possibly murder. The unlearned men, like swines, would tread the pearls under their feet. His disciples were to preach a simple gospel using illustrations from daily life and parables which were understood by all.



BREAD—STONE, SNAKE—FISH

Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone?

Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent?

Matt. 7 : 9, 10.

In many parts of Palestine and Arabia nomadic life still continues. Many people prefer the outdoor life. Their homes are tents woven of the hair of goats or structures built of rough stones. The houses are loosely built with large holes and cracks in the walls. Birds and even snakes build their nests in the ceiling which consists of brush and straw. It is a common sight to see snakes crawling along the ceiling and dropping to the floor. They come from the fields in search of food.

When fish is baked, it is placed in a basket. Its smell

often draws snakes and insects to the basket from the ceiling and from outside. It is quite common when taking out a fish to get hold of a snake which has crawled into the basket. People eat whenever they are hungry during the day or night. When children cry at night, parents quiet them with bread or other food. As there are no lamps, they have to be careful not to give a snake for a fish or a stone for bread. The people who live in tents keep the bread in a pile of stones around the tents so that one is apt to pick up a stone for bread which it closely resembles in shape and size. An Easterner often says to his enemy, "If you come to my house, I will set before you snake bones and stones."

Jesus used this illustration to show that if an earthly father who errs is careful about what he gives his children, how much more would the heavenly Father be concerned in bestowing good gifts to those who trust him? Luke 11 : 11, 12.



THE NARROW DOOR

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Matt. 7 : 13.

Church doors and doors of houses in the east are very narrow and low. The doors of sheep folds are likewise narrow and low. This is for security and protection from the enemy. When a house or sheep fold is attacked, both defenders and attackers fight for possession of the door.

According to the eastern version, the text reads "O how narrow is the door," instead of "O how narrow is the gate." The reference is to the entrance of a building with a roof or the entrance into a sheep fold, covered or uncovered. Gate, however, refers to the entrance into a garden or vineyard. Such gates are generally larger because animals laden with burdens have to pass through.

Easterners must bend down to pass through the narrow, low door into the house. This is not comfortable but there is no help for it. So also is the kingdom of heaven. The door is narrow and the road is filled with difficulty but those who travel thereon find eternal peace and happiness. Luke 13 : 24.



THE NARROW GATE

*Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way,
which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

Matt. 7 : 14.

In Aramaic, the text is: "Oh how narrow is the road and how few are found on it."

In the parts of the country where banditry and robbery take their toll, travelers commonly use two or more roads. The wide road is the popular highway on which caravans travel. It is an easier route for the traveler because water and other comforts of life can be had and it is shorter but it is also the road where robbery and murder predominate. This road is the one which most foolish and unwise travelers choose. On the other hand, when the peace of a country is disturbed, and a man depends upon himself alone for protection, he selects a different route. This is the narrow path trodden by wise men who seek safety first. It is unknown to bandits and robbers. It winds around steep mountains and hills far away from the main road where robbers cannot lie in wait to murder and plunder. It is a long and difficult road but the traveler reaches his destination safely.

These two roads are referred to by Jesus to illustrate the narrow road leading to heaven and the broad highway which many people travel, but which leads to destruction. The road of pleasure is wide and full of luxuries but the dangers are great and the journey ends in serious loss. The road leading to life is narrow and difficult and few are found on it. To travel this way, one must deny

himself all physical comforts which tend to destroy the spirit and must take up his cross to march through life until he reaches the gate of Paradise where happiness and eternal life are in store.



FALSE PROPHETS

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Matt. 7 : 15.

The word prophet in Aramaic and Hebrew is *nabia* which means to spring forth, to foretell the future, to announce the news. The prophets were not only seers who foretold future events and called God's wrath upon disobedient people but they were also the statesmen and leaders of their times. They understood both political and spiritual conditions from which knowledge they derived their conclusions and predicted the future. Both Jeremiah and Isaiah were prophets and great statesmen. During revolutions, wars and other national emergencies, they tried to lead the people and were advisers to their kings.

Semites, above all other peoples, are believers in prophecies and are mystically inclined. Future events are revealed in a vision during the night when the prophet is asleep because at night the mind is restful and at peace and its range of power is more penetrating. During sleep, no events take place, the mind does not register time and there is nothing to blur the clearness of the vision. God spoke to Samuel, Jacob and Daniel during the night and revelations came to the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah in their sleep.

Throughout religious history we find both prophets of God and prophets of Baal. False prophets and seers have always tried to imitate the works of the prophets of God. The Egyptian magicians performed every miracle which Moses displayed before the Egyptians. Moses warned his people against false prophets who would rise in the future

and Jesus cautioned his disciples against false prophets and christs who would do great signs and wonders to mislead the people. The works of the real prophets have lasted forever and their predictions have come true in every instance but the magical performances of the false prophets have been temporal and unreal. In fact, in all of life we find the real mingled with the false and often our eyes are deceived so we cannot distinguish between them. This is also revealed in plant and animal life. We have good trees and ordinary trees, apparently alike, but the test of the fruit shows the difference. Animals and birds appear to be of the same family but only some we can eat. Mark 13 : 22.



BY THEIR FRUITS

Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?

Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. Matt. 7 : 16, 17.

In some regions of Eastern countries, two trees of the same species may grow side by side but the quality of the fruit be different. In Aramaic the good trees are called *elana tava* and the bad trees *elana bisha*. They are alike as to size, branches and leaves. A native knows the difference but a stranger is misled until he tests the fruit. The fruit of the bad tree looks fine but it is bitter. Walnuts grown on a bad tree are hard to break even with a hammer and when broken, it is difficult to get out the kernel. Thus, trees are known not by their trunk and leaves but by their fruits.

We are often misled and confused by appearances. Frequently we judge people by their clothes, wealth and social standing and fail to discern their good qualities and their works. Fundamental character and not outward appearance influenced Jesus in the selection of his disciples.



BAD TREES CUT DOWN

Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Matt. 7: 19.

Cultivated and productive soil is very scarce in the Holy Land. Wheat crops are poor so the people depend largely upon fruits for their living. Trees are valued possessions but only fruit trees are planted. Every fruit tree which does not bear fruit is cut down and the wood used for kindling. All decayed trees are likewise destroyed so as to make space for fruitful trees.

Shade and decorative trees grow naturally but have little significance. Some are cut and burned for fuel. Sacred trees are the exception and are the survival of pagan rites. The branches are decorated with shreds of cloth placed by sick people and travelers as offerings. They seek its shadow for healing and rest. These trees are protected by an unwritten law. None dare touch their branches or pick up dry wood from them for fuel.

Jesus makes this figure of speech concerning the wicked who are worthless and who will finally be removed in favor of good and righteous men.



FOUNDATIONS

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock:

And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.

And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: Matt. 7: 24, 25, 26.

Many towns and villages in the east are built on the mountain slopes. Sometimes a town is divided by the valley. Houses are built on rocks and, in some cases, one of the walls is hewn out of the rock. These houses

withstand the storms because they are very durable and secure. Other men, owing to lack of space and because it is easier, build their homes near the edge of the valley on the sand. There is little fear of floods because the countries are very dry and floods seldom occur. However, at times during the rainy season, the dry valley does turn into a roaring river and the house, built on the sand, is washed away. Houses built on the banks of the river are inundated and the walls crumble and are destroyed. The raging water is so strong, it may even reach the house built on the rock but it can withstand the storm because it has a strong foundation.

This is a picture of a man who builds upon the foundation of truth which stands like rock and of another who builds on false doctrines which shift like sands. Rivers, winds and storms are symbolic of opposition, temptation and persecution which are bound to come. Luke 6 : 48.



PROPER TESTIMONY

And Jesus saith unto him, See thou tell no man; but go thy way, shew thyself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. Matt. 8 : 4.

The Eastern version reads, "Jesus then said to him, Look here, why are you telling it to men?" Most of Jesus healings took place in public. At times, while he was resting or eating, sick people were brought to him. In the east there is little privacy. Many families live in one house and when an honorable guest or a holy man is entertained, all people including the curious and the beggars, gather around him. The sick, brought to be healed, are accompanied by relatives and friends. During the conversations, healers are likely to be both praised and denounced.

The man healed of leprosy talked to those about him, praising Jesus and explaining he had tried all other healers and doctors but no one else had been able to heal him. Such conversations were not wise. They aroused the

hatred of relatives and friends of other healers and doctors in the crowd which had collected. Jesus saw the man was talking too much and told him that instead of wasting time talking, he should go to the priests, show himself and get a testimonial. Leprosy was a contagious disease and dangerous. A leper, when cured, had to be examined by the priests who had the sole authority to pronounce him cured (Lev. 14 : 3). As this healing took place in a crowd, Jesus would not have told him not to tell it to anyone, as the English translation has it, but was further showing his interest by reminding the man to report promptly to the priest.

On some occasions Jesus did warn his disciples not to speak of certain things in public. To say Jesus was the Messiah or the Son of God would have been dangerous to his cause at the beginning. He also told some whom he healed to tell it to no one because he did not want to raise needless disputes as happened after the blind man was healed. Mark 5 : 43; John 9 : 13.



AN OFFICER

For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me; and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. Matt. 8 : 9.

When this Roman centurion sought Jesus to heal his son he was reluctant to invite him to his house, not because it was not good enough for Jesus but because he was not a Jew. "I am not worthy that you enter under the shadow of my house, but just say a word and my son will be healed." This is a characteristic Oriental saying. The centurion's house must have been a far better house than any house of the Jews which Jesus entered but the centurion thought that Jesus might be a religious fanatic and so be unwilling to enter into his house and eat his bread. In the east, even today, people hesitate to enter homes and break bread with members of other faiths. A

native often goes to a missionary and says, "My boy is sick but just give me a little medicine for I do not want to trouble you to come to my house."

The centurion also had a strong faith in Jesus. He knew Jesus could heal his son by a word of command. He was a captain in the army and he did things by command. He recognized Jesus was a prince of the spiritual kingdom with unlimited powers and his words could accomplish in the realm of the spirit what his soldiers were doing for him by obeying his orders. The centurion derived his authority from Caesar, an earthly prince, and his words were obeyed. How much more would be the power of Jesus who derived his authority from God, the ruler of heaven and earth! Luke 7 : 8.



HOMELESS

And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.
Matt. 8 : 20.

This saying is symbolical of the Aramaic speech: "I have no place to lay down my head", meaning, I am a poor man or a man without a home.

Eastern houses are so crowded that while travelers and unexpected guests are welcomed and fed, they often have no place to sleep. They are allowed to sit down and lean against the wall or some other object to sleep, but there is no room to stretch their feet and they are not provided with bed quilts. Easterners have fixed dates for traveling and do so in large companies for the sake of protection from bandits and robbers so at these times, houses are more than overcrowded.

Jesus was a wanderer and such men are not always welcome in the east. When he was not received, he had to sleep out of doors. When he was received, if the house happened to be crowded, he had to sleep while sitting.

Jesus knew this man only wanted to follow him because of his popularity. He thought Jesus would be entertained

and he could share the hospitality given to him. Judas, and some of the other disciples who later forsook him, probably followed him for this reason. Jesus was very frank in admitting his poverty and unpopularity so as to avoid any misunderstanding on the part of prospective followers.



BURYING ONE'S FATHER

And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead. Matt. 8 : 21, 22.

The Aramaic word for dead is *metta* and the word for town is *matta*. The difference in the formation of the words and the pronunciation are slight. It is probable that Jesus said, "Let the town bury the dead." Such errors could easily occur in writing or copying of manuscripts. If a tiny dot under the second letter of the Aramaic word for dead is missing, the copyist might easily be misled. These dots or vowel points were not known when the Gospels were first written. Then again, manuscripts were often mutilated or blurred. It would have sounded harsh for Jesus to have said, "let the dead bury their dead," nor was this man's father dead at the time. Had this been the case, his son would have been busy burying him and Jesus would have been one of the mourners. For Easterners bury their dead soon after they die.

This phrase is an Orientalism, especially among Aramaic speaking people. It means "my father is an old man and I must take care of him until his death." Or, "My father is on the side of the grave" which means, my father may die any day. A man seventy years old is considered "dead" in the Orient because he is non-productive. As they have no insurance companies or banks for protection in old age, an aged man naturally becomes dependent on his son for a living. The highest desire of a

father, moreover, is to have his son at his death bed to close his eyes at the last hour, when he also pronounces his benediction upon his family. This was done by Jacob on his death bed. (Gen. 49).

This man was impressed by the teaching of Jesus but embarrassed by his duty to his aged father. Jesus appreciated it, but he told him that under such circumstances, others in the community would care for his father, if he enlisted in service for the kingdom of heaven. This is consistent with what he said elsewhere, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." (Matt. 6 : 33). Eastern people are noted for generosity and hospitality. They not only share food but also bury the dead of the community, and look after their aged.



COME TO TORMENT US

And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?
Matt. 8 : 29.

It is not unusual to see an insane man at the divan of a high government official or nobleman, or even a holy man. On such occasions many easterners amuse themselves by teasing or torturing an insane man. The lunatic is made to sing, curse and say many things to entertain the guests. At times they are angered by young men who torture them.

When men are discovered with symptoms of insanity, they are taken to the priest or shrine for healing. Those who become violent are threatened by priests and holy men who try to scare them in order to drive out the insanity. Some Mohammedan religious healers recommend various forms of torture. The insane man is sometimes branded with a hot iron. Others, particularly violent, are threatened with burial alive and if the threat does not temper them, they are actually buried for a little while. An opening is left for breathing. This primitive treatment is prac-

tised now by only the wildest and most primitive tribes. On this account the crazy are always afraid of religious men. Then again, in many eastern countries there are no homes for insane people, who roam around the town and are constantly annoyed and tortured.

When these men saw Jesus accompanied by a group of disciples and other people they were afraid of him. They thought he might prescribe torturing remedies to heal them, or that they would be brought before him for his entertainment. Banquets are generally held in the evening. This explains their reference in the words "before the time," because he had come on the scene in the morning. When the disciples were charged with being drunk, Peter replied that it was only nine in the morning (Acts 2 : 15).



LUNATICS AND THE SWINE

So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine.

And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. Matt. 8 : 31, 32.

Jesus and his disciples crossed from Galilee in Palestine to Gadara in Syria, which was on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. At the landing place they were met by two lunatics who came out of the cemetery. In the east, insane asylums are unknown. Crazy men roam about and live in cemeteries which are located at a short distance from the town. Frequently strangers who are not welcomed by the town people find a resting place in the cemetery also.

These crazy men saw a boat crossing from Galilee and when Jesus and his disciples disembarked they immediately recognized a Jewish prophet. They had probably heard of Jesus and of his miraculous works as Gadara is separated from Galilee by only a few miles of water,

so, no doubt, the lunatics knew Jesus and his disciples. Also, in the east, when a man is accompanied by twelve men, he is either a religious teacher or a high official and would attract the attention of everybody.

When these lunatics approached Jesus, they said to him, "If you heal us, permit us to attack the herd of swine" which was feeding by the lake. "Cast out" is an Aramaic phrase which means, to restore to sanity, to remove the cause which produces insanity. Today Aramaic speaking people often say to a healer cast out or cut my diseases. "He cut my fever" means he healed me of fever. Some healers strike a piece of stone on a metal to drive the sickness out.

The Aramaic word *al* means attack and it also means enter. Men enter into each other when they wrestle or fight, and oxen enter into each other when they attack or chase each other. Assyrians say *la al beh* which literally means do not enter into him, that is, do not attack or bother him. These men were afflicted with insanity. In the east, when a man is insane, it is said he is under the influence of the devil and when he speaks, the devil speaks in him. It is often said, "He has turned into a devil", meaning, he has become violent with insanity. We read that Satan entered into Judas but it was Judas and not Satan who bargained with the chief priests to betray Jesus. (Luke 22 : 3-4). In this case, the lunatics conversed with Jesus and not the devils who were supposed to be in them. The devils would not have asked permission to enter into the swine and be drowned in the sea, for they had entered into men without permission.

These crazy men were Syrians whose people kept large swine herds which were an abomination to the Jews. As proof of their conversion to the Jewish faith and in appreciation of what Jesus had done for them, they wanted to destroy the swine. They realized Jesus was a great prophet and the Jewish God had more power than the Syrian gods whose prophets could not heal them. It is so today in the east. When people are converted to a different faith, they discontinue the practices considered unclean by the new faith. A Christian cannot become a

Mohammedan and be admitted into fellowship unless he sells or kills his swine and repudiates all customs and practices which the Mohammedan faith declares unclean. When eastern Christians join a Protestant church which upholds temperance, they destroy all their jars of wine as a proof of their sincerity. When St. Paul preached at Ephesus, the Ephesians who accepted his teaching destroyed the images and burned the sacred books of the pagan religions. (Acts 19 : 19). The image business declined, the artisans became alarmed and when they met together, decided to expel Paul from the city lest their business be destroyed completely. (Acts 19 : 23).

When the Gadarenes saw the lunatics were healed and had become converts to the Jewish faith and that already some of the swine had been drowned, they were panic-stricken. They decided not to allow Jesus to preach in Gadara fearing his mission would result in many conversions which would destroy the swine business. They felt their livelihood was more important than the religion of a Nazarene prophet so they begged Jesus to return to his own country. They did not allow him to go further into their territory and so he returned immediately to Galilee. Mark 5 : 11, 12; Luke 8 : 33.



BED

But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house.
Matt. 9 : 6.

The bed in Bible lands is unlike what is used in American and European homes. The bed is made up of a quilt and a few rugs. During the day the bed is used for reclining.

Eastern houses generally have one large room. In some localities the entire family sleep on one bed which is spread on the floor. Some people because of the shortage of bedding invite their guests who are strangers to share

their bed with them. Immorality is practically unknown in the East, and any hospitality is sacredly respected.

As most people do not undress before they sleep, there is no concern about privacy. The house is lighted with a candle when the people go to bed. The men rise early before the rest of the family.



PHYSICIAN AND HEALER

But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.
Matt. 9 : 12.

There are two Aramaic words for doctor. The one used in writing is *asya*, meaning healer. The other is *hakim* used in common speech and is derived from the Aramaic word *khakam*, to be wise. *Khakima* means a wise man. This word is of Western Aramaic origin for in that dialect *Kh* is pronounced as *h*. The word *hakim* also means governor or mayor because these officials act as advisers in state matters.

The Oriental doctor is different from American and European doctors. He is not a graduate of a medical school. He has no medicines nor does he prescribe remedies. His chief duties are to see what is the trouble with the patient and to advise him as to his physical and moral conditions. The healer talks to the patient and encourages him by saying he will soon recover by the help of God. Eastern healers know nothing about the causes of nervous troubles. These cases are treated by prayer and fasting. The sick are taken to priests and religious healers who read a portion of the Scriptures over them and speak some cheerful words about faith in God.

There are other doctors who deal with broken bones and wounds. They seldom use medicines but make adjustments of the bones and treat the wounds with herbs. These doctors rise from time to time in certain families and the secrets of the profession are handed down from father to son.

Eastern doctors and healers charge nothing for their services. They believe such powers are bestowed on them by God to be used freely. They have received them freely and must give freely. They believe if they charge for their services, the sick man will not be healed. This prevents any doubt in the mind of the healer. If he accepts money, he fears it may be demanded back if the patient is not healed. Gifts are, however, offered as a thank offering after the sick person is healed. (2 Kings 5 : 5-20). Doctors are highly respected and cared for by Eastern people so they are free to give their services gratis. Mark 2 : 17, 5 : 26; Luke 4 : 23.



FASTING AND WEDDING FEASTS

And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast. Matt. 9 : 15.

Fasting is strictly observed in Eastern countries. Weddings and banquets are planned in advance so they do not fall during the fasts. Feasts are considered irreligious during this period because of the accompanying drinking and dancing. People generally fast from morning to evening. Some fast from meat, butter and cheese; others from every kind of food. A wedding or banquet is therefore out of the question.

Easterners are usually sober and live simply but during wedding feasts and banquets they indulge in drinking and excessive eating. Social customs, fastings and other religious observances are put aside for the time being. A complete change takes place; sadness and weariness disappear, enemies become reconciled; poor and rich alike try to make the most of such times. During a wedding feast, people eat and drink day and night as long as the wedding lasts. The bridegroom and bride sit at the head of the banquet table. Nothing is lacking for on such occasions Eastern generosity provides abundant food and

wine. Neighbors send their wives, carrying trays of delicious dishes prepared for the event, to visit the bride. Some weddings last three days and others seven days. Some of the merrymakers eat, drink and even sleep at the bridegroom's house. Beggars and strangers alike share the generosity. Everybody is joyful.

When the wedding days are completed and the feast is over, a sudden gloom settles on the village which becomes quiet. The bustle ceases when the musicians depart and out-of-town guests leave. Beggars go back to begging. Strangers seek lodgings for the night elsewhere. Some men and women begin fasting.

The disciples of the Pharisees and of John fasted according to Jewish tradition but the disciples of Jesus did not fast. Jesus was the bridegroom who was with them only for a brief period. While he was with them, they need not observe the traditions of the elders but the time was to come when he would be taken away just as the bridegroom leaves the merrymakers. Then his disciples would turn to fasting. Mark 2 : 19; Luke 5 : 34; John 3 : 29.



NEW CLOTH IN OLD GARMENTS

No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse. Matt. 9 : 16.

In lands where styles are unknown and clothes are worn not for beauty and comfort but for protection of the body, garments are constantly mended and worn until they fall to pieces. It is not unusual for Easterners to wear the garments of their grandparents because garments are handed from father to son and mother to daughter. Besides most Easterners prefer to wear the same styles as their forefathers.

Usually an old garment is repaired with a patch cut from a worn-out garment. The old piece of cloth matches better on the old garment than a new piece. However,

new cloth is used to patch an old garment. Generally when new cloth is made into a new garment, the left over pieces and trimmings are kept for patching so when a woman fails to find an old patch to sew on an old garment, she uses a piece of the new cloth which has been left over. The new patch does not fit well on the old garment because the new cloth is too heavy for the worn garment to hold and in a few days the new patch begins to pull away leaving a larger rent. Moreover when the garment is washed the new piece shrinks and the old part tears under the strain.

Such is the case of a man who is influenced by old beliefs and receives a new teaching. The force of the new weakens and shatters the old. Mark 2 : 21; Luke 5 : 36.



NEW WINE AND OLD BOTTLES

Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved. Matt. 9 : 17.

U ntil recent years glass bottles and wooden barrels were unknown in Bible lands. In some Eastern countries such articles are still a curiosity. Wine, milk and oil are stored and transported in goatskins. When goats are killed, they are skinned from the neck down without tearing the skins. These are prepared as containers for wine, milk and other supplies.

When new wine is poured into old goatskins, the wine ferments and bursts the skins. New wine is therefore stored and transported in new skins because they resist the effects of fermentation and both wine and skins are preserved. When a family is short of new skins, the new wine is carried in old skins at great risk.

The new gospel with a new spiritual message to humanity needed new apostles, teachers and laws. The old Jewish traditions and dogmas could not express its meaning. The worn-out priestly system was to crumble before

the power of the new teaching just as old skins burst with the fermenting of new wine. Men and women were to receive the power from the new gospel and be free from false theologies and traditions. Mark 2 : 22; Luke 5 : 37.



MOURNING


And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise, Matt. 9 : 23.

Semites, more than any other people, mourn over their dead. Men and women are honored twice; first at their wedding when all the town shares in the joy and helps to make the wedding a success; later at death when all neighbors and friends, even enemies, weep vehemently and lament their departure. Easterners not only weep over the dead but also strike their faces with their hands, tear their clothes and even inflict wounds on themselves. Women cut their hair and smite their breasts; men stop shaving as a sign of mourning. David tore his garments and wept bitterly when the news of the death of Saul and Jonathan was brought to him. (2 Sam. 1 : 11.)

The weeping and wailing at an Oriental funeral is aroused to its highest point by the professional singers with songs of lamentations and by the eulogies by men and women. The relatives of the dead accompany the professional singers. The deceased is kissed and called by name. The singers talk to him as if he were alive, at times even criticizing him and making jokes at his expense. Weeping and wailing usually start before the person is actually dead. When men are in a coma, they are given up for dead.

Jesus understood the Oriental hysteria and grief. He knew the people looked on death as a calamity. When he entered the house, he commanded the people to leave the sick room and the professional singers to stop making the noise which scared the little child. "The girl is not dead but she is sleeping," he said. This is an Oriental phrase often used to quiet the distressed mother. In the eyes of

Jesus, death was nothing but sleep even though it was longer than ordinary sleep. The dead person was alive because the soul continued to live. He took the girl by the hand and addressed her in Aramaic *Talita koome*, "O little girl arise." Mark 5 : 38; Luke 9 : 49.




SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD

But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd. Matt. 9 : 36.

In Eastern lands cattle are often left in the fields and mountains to graze without the care of a shepherd. It is not so with sheep. Sheep must be led into the pasture and brought back to the fold. They would not go or come back without the shepherd. They are timid and fearful when alone and even when under the care of the shepherd, at the sight of a strange man or the sound of a strange voice, they are panic-stricken.

The shepherd must constantly watch his sheep and the sheep are always aware he is with them. He leads them into new pastures. During the heat of the day, he takes them under the shade of trees and when they are thirsty, to water. The shepherd protects them from wolves, bears, sheep thieves and bandits. David killed a lion and a bear when they attacked his sheep. (1 Sam. 17 : 34-36). If anything happens to the shepherd, his sheep scatter in the mountains and go astray.

The reference is to the people of Israel who were as sheep without a shepherd. They had been subjugated by foreign nations and betrayed by their own priests. For centuries they had no prophets and seers to guide them. Misrule and persecution had scattered them in foreign lands and even those who were at home had no genuine leadership. They, also, were soon to be scattered by the destruction of Jerusalem. Mark 6 : 34.



BEWARE OF GENTILE PRACTICES

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not:

But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Matt. 10 : 5, 6.

The word "way" in this passage does not mean a road but a habit or practice. Do not go into the way of Gentiles means do not practice the customs of the Gentiles.

In the East, men and women of different faiths travel the same road in company with each other, converse and sleep at the same inn, but they do not eat together. The food supply carried by one party is unclean to another. Some eat pork and other foods, condemned as unclean abominations by those of other religions. A member of one sect may have two wives but if he finds a bargain while on the journey he would not hesitate to take a third wife. People of different religions live for generations in the same neighborhood but continue loyal to their religions and the observance of distinctive customs and traditions.

The disciples of Jesus were to travel and preach among the people of their own faith. In most cities Jews and pagans were neighbors; their houses separated only by a thin wall. The disciples of the new teaching were placed in a peculiar situation. In the eyes of the pagans, they were Jews while the Jews regarded them as heretics and pagans because they did not observe the traditions of the elders. This created additional difficulties and made their mission harder. They were welcomed by neither Jews nor pagans in the same inns where they lodged. These difficulties would lead to the temptation to lean toward pagan customs. If these were adopted and practiced by them, the Jewish leaders would show greater resentment to Jesus and his followers because the Jews hated both Samaritans and pagans. They were rather to go in the way of the Hebrew prophets and preach first to

people of their own faith. Even though they were in a pagan city their mission was first to seek and find "the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

The disciples were to observe strictly some of the most important and basic Jewish customs on which the Jewish faith rested. They were to adhere to fundamental principles which distinguished Jews from pagans. This was necessary in order to convert the Jews. When one alienates himself from the customs and practices of a people he also loses their confidence and retards his work.

THE WAY OF GENTILES

This is an Aramaic colloquial expression, which means do not follow Gentile habits and practices. In the East the customs and manners of one race are an abomination to the members of another. Members of one faith cannot eat and drink with those of a different faith. The followers of different faiths are known not by their theology but by their customs. Each faith has its own standard of living, and its members must faithfully adhere to it.

While traveling people of one faith generally stop in the homes of other faiths, but they must not follow their customs. For instance, a Jew does not eat cheese made by Christians and Mohammedans because the yeast which is used to make cheese comes from an animal, and the animal is killed by a member of the alien faith. A Christian cannot eat Jewish bread because Jewish leaven is considered unclean. The Mohammedan eats Christian food, but he cannot take wine, or strong drink.

The disciples of Jesus were to travel among Gentiles and pagans. They were carefully to follow their own customs because departure from Jewish social traditions would hamper their mission among the Jews. They would be looked upon as heretics if they were found practicing things that were common among Gentiles and forbidden by Jewish law. Their mission was at first to the Jews.



MONEY FOR THE JOURNEY

Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses,
Matt. 10 : 9.

The Eastern text reads "do not accumulate gold nor silver nor brass in your purses." As banks are unknown, money is carried in purses and girdles wrapped around men. In the Near East a traveling man is killed only when the bandits find money on his person. This is done to hide the identity of the murderers in order to escape punishment. A man traveling without money has nothing to fear. So far as safety and freedom are concerned, he is the safest and freest man in the world, while on the road. If he should be in need and is met by robbers they would offer to help him and let him go in peace. Oriental bandits often share their scanty supplies of food with travelers whom they meet.

Jesus knew that if his disciples went out preaching, uninstructed and unprepared, they would be in danger of falling into temptation. He knew that many men and women would give them their wealth and even their jewels for the sake of having their bodies healed, their sight restored, or their loved ones raised from the dead. He knew that his disciples, endowed with the power of healing, would soon accumulate riches and become the prey of bandits who would be tempted to kidnap them for ransom.

Then again, the division of wealth among the disciples would soon become a problem and stir rivalry and hatred so as to weaken their ranks and interfere with the progress of their work. There were also grave fears that worldly men would offer themselves for missionary work, because of self-interest. Missionaries are kidnapped in China because the Chinese bandits know that they could pay the ransom. Early missionaries were not exposed to this danger, because they were known to be poor.

Jesus understood the mind and psychology of the people of the East. He knew that Eastern people would never welcome and believe the teachings of missionaries who

are paid for preaching the Word of God. His disciples, like himself, were to minister, and not to be ministered unto. They were to be ready to lay down their lives for the sake of the truth, and they would be fed by the people among whom they labored, "for the workman is worthy of his food." Moreover, Easterners are hospitable to strangers. They are invited to enter their homes and are generously provided with food and lodgings.



BAG

Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.
Matt. 10 : 10.

The Aramaic word for scrip is *tarmala* which means bag. It is woven of wool like Oriental rugs and then sewed together. Its size is about one foot by a foot and a half. The *tarmala* is used on a journey to carry bread and other food supplies and to bring merchandise.

In the East when one leaves his home, he does not expect to find food until he arrives in a town. Restaurants and inns where one can stop to rest and obtain refreshments are unknown. Bread and food are seldom sold to strangers but if a traveler is welcomed to a house, lodging and food are freely given him. On long journeys, however, travelers depend largely upon the food supplies which they carry. A traveler may be stranded on the road, or upon his arrival in a town, he may be unable to find lodging, or he may be welcomed by a poor family who would find it difficult to set bread before him. In this case he eats his own bread, giving a portion of it to the members of the family in exchange for buttermilk and cheese which is shared with him generously.

A traveler with many servants and much baggage is seldom welcome in an Oriental house. The family is reluctant to open their doors to such guests because their presence draws the neighbors who will also have to be entertained at the same time. The family, moreover, not

only feeds these guests but must also replenish the food supplies for the road. Another interesting fact is that a guest with a bag is generally supposed to be going on a long journey. A guest without a bag is usually on a short journey and when he is asked to eat, declines saying, "I am not hungry and I am returning to my own house soon."

The disciples of Jesus were not on a journey as traveling men and merchants with their retinue of servants and bags. They were to be unlike other travelers. They were to be welcomed, entertained, and their needs supplied by the people to whom they were to carry the message of the new gospel just as their Master had been cared for. When they were traveling and preaching with him, they lacked nothing. They were received in homes and at times entertained lavishly. They were to expect the same treatment from the people because they were to preach the same gospel and perform miracles and wonders as he did. Their Lord on his travels did not carry a bag with food and often suffered thirst and hunger. The disciples once watched him returning from a side road after failing to find figs to satisfy his hunger. The preachers of the new faith were to suffer and be hungry in order to warn the people against greed and extravagance, Mark 6 : 8, 9.

TWO COATS

In lands where styles are unknown, people wear as many shirts as they can afford. Often the social standing of a man is known by the number of shirts and other garments he wears. When a stranger enters a house, he is rated by the number of shirts he wears. A poor man generally has one shirt. When it is soiled he remains home until it is washed and dried or he borrows one from a friend who happens to be sick or idle at home. A rich man wears as many as half a dozen shirts and several coats at one time.

Travelers often wear more than one shirt. This is done

for appearance so they will be welcomed in the towns they enter and for protection from cold. Also, as Easterners have no suit cases or trunks so at home or on a journey, they wear everything, fearing the garments left at home will be used by others. Hotels and inns are unknown in most Eastern countries. Travelers sleep in the clothes they wear. Even when they are entertained as guests, they sleep in their own garments. Most hosts are poor and at times receive more guests than they can accommodate. They feed them and give them a mat to spread under them while they sleep on the earthen floor.

Travelers on the road are often victims of bandits who take away their clothes and shoes. These robbers generally attack men who have more than one shirt. They search very carefully for money and if it is not found, then the traveler is beaten and his shirts taken away. Bandits seldom attack men with one shirt. They consider them poor. They search them and let them go. Many Easterners are aware of this. Therefore when they travel, they give away their good garments and wear a few poor ones so as to mislead the bandits. Jesus knew if his disciples wore more than one shirt, they would likely become victims of the professional bandits who prey on travelers and caravans. The less shirts they had, the less trouble they would have. Luke 9 : 3.

TWO PAIRS OF SHOES

In Kurdistan and Assyria and in some other regions where western civilization has not yet penetrated, people still wear woolen shoes. These are manufactured from a piece of woolen carpet which is heavily sewn with thread until it becomes hard like leather. This type of shoe is very comfortable especially on a journey. Some travelers carry two pairs, wearing one and repairing the other on the way. Robbers usually relieve travelers of the extra pair and if they resist, they are beaten and at times killed. In the East, it is always better to travel very light so as to avoid trouble on the way.

LABORER WORTHY OF HIS FOOD

When an Easterner hires laborers, he bargains about wages and food. Customarily the employer provides food for his laborers. Especially during the vineyard and harvest season, employers feed their laborers very generously. Food stuffs and other supplies are stored for the summer season for the workmen and food is very abundant.

When a laborer demands high wages, the question of food is raised by the employer but when a man is willing to work without a stipulated wage, the question of food is never discussed. Men with poor reputations as hard workers do not generally bargain for wages but work for what they can get.

In the East any type of service performed is worth food. The disciples were worthy of the food supplied them because they were preaching and healing free. They did not ask wages or fees. The people gladly welcomed them and gave them food and lodging. Easterners are always hospitable to travelers and strangers, especially so to preachers of the gospels. Luke 10 : 7.



FLEE TO ANOTHER CITY

But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come.

Matt. 10 : 23.

Biblical system of government and law still dominate some Eastern countries. In some provinces, federal authority is hardly noticeable. The provincial governor and his officials are the only government authorities which the people know and recognize. The districts under the provinces are governed by subordinates who exercise full authority in governmental and judicial matters.

There are also some regions and cities maintaining complete freedom and autonomy from provincial and federal rule. These localities are generally governed by local hereditary chiefs among whom rivalry and hatred reigns.

When a man flees from one city to another, he is welcomed and given protection by the authorities. Offences and crimes committed in one city cannot be held against the person in another city. Murderers and thieves oftentimes flee to other cities in order to escape punishment. They share a portion of their spoils with officials in order to secure freedom. In Biblical days certain cities were chosen to which murderers could flee for refuge. Num. 35 : 6; Josh. 21 : 13-38.

CONVERSION OF JEWS

The Aramaic word *tshalamon* is the second person plural. It is derived from the word *shalem* which means surrender, convert and finish. The Eastern text reads "You shall not finish converting all the cities of the house of Israel until the Son of man returns." The disciples were to work first among people of their own faith as there was much to be done among them. They had to convert and obtain the support of some Jewish people before the movement could spread among the Gentiles. This was not an easy task. They were to meet with adversities, oppositions and persecutions. Their own friends and relatives would betray them to governors and city officials but the gospel work was to continue until the whole world, including the Jews, would be converted. The Jewish race will be the last to embrace Christianity. Even when Jesus returns, some of the cities in Palestine will not have surrendered to him.

Jesus did not mean the disciples were merely to go over the cities of Palestine because all the cities of Palestine could be covered in a few months. He meant they were to convert the Jewish race. Many centuries have passed yet little has been accomplished among the Jews. When the Jews are finally converted, the ideals of Jesus

will then be an accomplished fact. His kingdom will be established over all the world and his personality felt in the hearts of all races.



SECRETS

What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the house tops.
Matt. 10 : 27.

Public places for gatherings and meetings are scarcely known and people meet on the house tops. Houses are built in a box shape with flat roofs, which are used as playgrounds for children and meetings for men and women. Town councils and church meetings are also held on the roof. Most secret conversations and gossip are likewise carried on there.

Where there are no newspapers and other publications, secret conversations are carried from mouth to mouth. The only way to publish news quickly is to tell the person to whom you speak to tell no one. In this way the news becomes important and is told to the next man with the same instruction to tell no one. In a few hours the news gets broadcast in the town and everyone is talking about it. On the other hand, the news which is not confided does not carry weight and people do not discuss it.

Jesus told his disciples not to tell the people openly what he was telling them secretly. This was the best way to broadcast the news. Some of these instructions were not meant. On other occasions he charged his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah, because the people were not yet ready to believe it and such news would have caused disturbances. "Tell no man" therefore depends on how it is said, the manner in which the speaker gives instruction. Sometimes it is said in a joking way, at others it is serious.



NOT PEACE BUT A SWORD

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. Matt. 10 : 34.

Political leaders invariably promise material prosperity. Prophets predict vengeance and peace and tranquillity. No leader or prophet could win the public without certain promises of change in the social and political order because in countries where persecution and injustice prevail, people always look to a leader to bring peace. Such revolutionary changes are brought about by the sword.

Jesus did not mean his mission was to start agitation, strife and war but his ideas were so revolutionary and contrary to the social and religious order of his day, they could not be carried out without revolution and war. His teaching upset dogmas and traditions and challenged the priestly authority. Divisions because of religious beliefs appeared in organizations as well as in homes. A son who accepted Jesus' teaching was hated by his orthodox father and looked upon as a traitor to his ancestral faith. A daughter hated her mother if she embraced the Christian faith. Jesus made clear the new revolutionary teaching would cause many persecutions and much suffering.

Jesus was very emphatic in declaring the people should not expect his mission to bring immediate peace. He did not make false promises. He wanted his followers to be aware of the future dangers which would confront them. In this way he eliminated from his ranks all who would have followed him for the sake of worldly gains and he enlisted only those who were ready to renounce everything in favor of the gospel and, if necessary, to give even their lives for it. Luke 12 : 51-53.



SOFT GARMENTS

But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. Matt. 11 : 8.

Semites have always been sheep raising people, and because of the abundance of sheep, garments are made of wool. Cotton, linen and silk garments are scarce and considered a luxury and are worn by the rich. Even though cotton and linen industries are very old, the art of spinning and weaving of cotton goods is hardly known among the hill people whose occupation is sheep raising. This is probably because cotton cannot be grown in mountainous regions. The Nomads know well the art of spinning and weaving woolen garments and rugs, which are used both for wearing and for bedding. The fabrics are very rough and warm, but the people are accustomed to them. Cotton goods are manufactured in large cities where cotton industries are known and where wool is scarce. In some isolated regions cotton garments are hardly known and even the shoes are made of wool, and the hair of goats. In such places a cotton garment is more costly because of the scarcity of the cotton.

John was not the only one who wore garments made from the hair of camels. It was also used for garments by the Nomad people in the Arabian desert. Jesus and his disciples wore woolen garments. They could not afford to wear cotton or linen, which at that time was very costly and only worn by princes and kings. Luke 11 : 25.



BORN OF A WOMAN

Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.
Matt. 11 : 11.

Born of a woman is an Aramaic idiom which means, a human being. The term is used to emphasize man's weaknesses against his racial background, title and pride. It is often said "he is born of a woman, he is likely to fall"; or "what he has done is so great and hardly possible for one who is born of a woman." This is because Easterners believe that the fall of man was due to the weakness of woman in the Garden of Eden.

According to Jesus, John was the greatest prophet of the old order because he repudiated the nobility and the Jewish traditional and racial theology. While attacking the Pharisees he said, "God can raise children to Abraham from these stones" as he denounced the old order, he announced the new one, and the coming of the new kingdom, where repentance was more necessary than traditional ancestry and racial pride. The salvation of men was henceforth to be based not on the racial ancestry, but on the acceptance of the king.

The least one in the new kingdom of Christ would be greater than John. He was the son of a priest and was educated by his father, but Peter and the sons of Zabe-dee, the Galilean fishermen, were to surpass him in knowledge and greatness, because to them the secrets of the kingdom were to be revealed for the first time. Luke 7 : 25.



CORRUPTION

And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. Matt. 11 : 12.

The Eastern text reads "The kingdom of heaven has been administered by force." The reference is to the purpose of the Jewish religion which was to prepare the way for the kingdom of heaven where the Messiah would reign. It was administered by force and controlled only by those in power. The leaders were rival high priests, who exercised complete political, social and spiritual power over the people. They were selected largely by bribery and corruption. Injustice was the chief characteristic. The Pharisees and priests were more interested in their official positions than in leading men into the kingdom of heaven or entering themselves. Prophets and seers who condemned injustice and violence and showed the path of truth which led to the kingdom were slain.

This state of affairs was ended by the teaching of Jesus. The doors of the kingdom of heaven were now open. The Scriptures were explained, the traditions of the elders were exposed and the gospel of righteousness was proclaimed.



MY YOKE IS EASY

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. Matt. 11 : 29.

Yoke is an Aramaic expression for **taxation** and other burdens which an overlord levies on his subjects. Just as the neck of an ox bends under the weight of a heavy yoke, so Easterners are crushed under heavy duties and taxes.

The inhabitants of a village bear the expenses of their lord, maintain his household, provide food and other supplies, and perform services assigned to them. Some rulers are easier on their subjects than others. Some marry many wives and live lavishly at the expense of the people. Others live plainly and are content with only one wife. Thus, the simpler the ruler lives, the lighter are the burdens of the subjects. In some cases when very heavy taxes are exacted, the misruled subjects revolt because they feel they can no longer carry the yoke of their lord. One can hear people say to one another "Our yoke has become unbearable." Subjects are happy when the yoke of a ruler is light.

When a new ruler succeeds his father, the first thing he does, if he is kindly and merciful, is reduce the taxes and lighten the burdens of the people. His subjects continue their loyalty and forget the injustice of his father and his servants. Reforms are carried out by cutting down the expense of the ruler's household and the dismissal of crafty stewards and servants. Such rulers are loved by their people. Easterners always pray for good rulers and curse the evil rulers long after their death. When Rehoboam ascended the throne of Solomon, his father, the people of Israel came to him and asked him to lighten their burdens. After rejecting the counsel of the wise and listening to the advice of the young men, Rehoboam told his subjects the yoke was to be heavier than that of his father, that his little finger would be thicker than his father's thumb.*

The Jews were heavily burdened with taxes. There were imperial, state and temple levies. The people maintained the state and its officials as well as the temple and its extravagant priests. Both temporal and spiritual rulers lived in luxurious palaces at the expense of the poor. The people had to be loyal to both systems in order to exist.

Jesus had no palaces, temples and sacred shrines. The

*The King James version translates the word "loins" instead of "thumb." (Kings 12 : 10.)

God he preached was a loving father who expected no sacrifices and gifts from his people. He could be approached with a simple prayer. Men were to be freed from their burdens. Temporal and spiritual powers were ultimately to be one and God the ruler over both.



PLUCKING EARS OF WHEAT

At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat. Matt. 12 : 1.

Palestine is a wheat growing country. The people depend on it chiefly for food. Vegetables and other cereal grains are little grown but small fields of wheat are scattered all over the land. Roads, except a few military routes, were unknown in Palestine until recent days. Narrow, winding paths are cut by travelers through wheat fields. The farmers do not like this but they know travelers must have some passage.

During the harvest season, farmers guard their wheat from travelers and robbers who pluck the wheat, beat it with a stick and carry away large quantities of the grain, but no farmer objects to a traveler taking a handful of wheat to eat. They are aware travelers are often short of bread. The wheat is plucked, rubbed in the hand, then dropped from one hand to the other until the chaff is blown away by the breath of the mouth and the wheat is clean to be eaten. If there is time and a convenient place, it is roasted.

Jesus and his disciples often used this method to supply their needs. In those days there were no restaurants or eating places. Even today, a traveler finds it hard to buy bread and must rely on the hospitality of the people or on fruits for his subsistence. Mark 2 : 23; Luke 6 : 1.



BLASPHEMY AGAINST HOLY SPIRIT

Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

Matt. 12 : 31.

The Aramaic word *rokha*, spirit, also means healing power. It is this power which passes from the healer to the sick. The healer is the instrument through which the sick person is connected with divine power. Any doubt in the mind interrupts the connection just as rust prevents the current from passing through connecting wires.

The Pharisees thought Jesus was deriving this power from Beelzebub, the prince of the devils. They could not see how else he could heal because his actions and utterances were unorthodox and not in harmony with those of the priests and elders. They therefore thought he was invoking the power of the devil in his healing. Jesus heard all these false accusations against him and could no longer hold his peace. He said in effect, "If you blaspheme against God, you will be forgiven because you do not know him. If you blaspheme against the Son, you will be forgiven because you do not know where he comes from but if you blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, you will never be forgiven in this world or the world to come. You see with your own eyes men are healed and yet you say it is the spirit of the devil which does the healing. How could one devil cause sickness and another heal? How could a kingdom be divided against itself and stand?" The Jews saw these things done before their eyes. That is why they would never be forgiven. The law forgives people for a crime done unknowingly but condemns them when they know and do wrong. Mark 3 : 28, 29.



GOOD TREE—GOOD FRUITS

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. Matt. 12 : 33.

The eastern text more correctly reads "Either produce like a good tree with good fruits; or produce like a bad tree with bad fruits; for a tree is known by its fruits." The reference is to men who try to appear righteous but whose works are evil. Some men who fast, pray, give alms and hold high religious offices also oppress the poor, confiscate property of widows and orphans. The harm done by this type of people under the guise of religion is more than that caused by bandits and robbers. This is because the former acts are covered by religious ceremonials and false devotions so that the public is often misled. On the other hand, bandits and robbers operate openly.

A tree is known by its fruits. No good tree can bear both bad and good fruits. It either will produce good or bad.

This was a direct attack against the Jews who strongly upheld the law of Moses and were willing to die for their religion, but whose acts were evil. These men paraded in long garments and prayed on street corners just to be seen by men and yet they were guilty of corruption and extortion. Jesus was more bitter against these men than those who were known to be sinners.



ANY IDLE WORD

But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. Matt. 12 : 36.

Idle here means reckless and rash. It refers to a remark that might cause dispute and result in a quarrel. What Jesus meant here was oriental gossip. In eastern coun-

tries where newspapers and books are almost unknown, people pass the time gossiping. There are few things to be discussed and at times men make thoughtless or hasty remarks about other people not because they are vicious but have nothing special to do. A casual remark may thus spread rapidly and in passing from one man to another, the original thought is exaggerated and the words sound defamatory. The person against whom the remark is made hastens to retaliate and the author of the remark has to suffer the consequences.

What Jesus is here stressing is the thought of personal responsibility concerning one's speech so that nothing is said which would do damage to another. One whose speech makes trouble will have to answer for it on the last day.



JONAH AND THE WHALE

But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas:

For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. Matt. 12 : 39-41.

According to the interpretation of dreams in the East, a fish or whale, means trouble, disturbance and indecision. Jonah in the whale is an Oriental hyperbole, and means Jonah is in trouble, just as an American would say, "he is in a hole," or "he is out of a hole." This American slang would be confusing to an Easterner, just as the term "Jonah in the whale" would be to a Westerner, unfamiliar with Oriental speech.

Jonah was a poor Jew whom God had called to go to Nineveh to rebuke an Assyrian king who had conquered Palestine and many other parts of the East. Jonah was

to tell the king that Nineveh was to fall and the great empire crumble. This was not an easy task for a peasant like Jonah to do. The weight and seriousness of this mission thus placed Jonah in a hole. For three days he could not decide how to go to Nineveh and how to approach the king. A little mistake would cost him his head. He finally found out a way to do this. But he was not quite sure that God would destroy such a great city and its people. The writer therefore portrayed a picture setting forth Jonah's difficulties in figurative speech. The men who threw him overboard were those who advised him not to listen to God's voice. A gourd was planted to keep Jonah from the heat of the sun. The writer was trying to show that as Jonah liked this plant, so God loved the people of Nineveh and that he might change his mind and not actually destroy them. Easterners do not question God's wisdom and power. We believe every thing is possible for God because he is the author of all laws and governor of the universe. God appeared and talked to Jonah just as he appeared to Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezekiel and talked with them by means of signs and symbols. St. Ephraim, an early Eastern commentator on the Scriptures (360 A.D.) in one of his hymns about Jonah states the incident took place in a dream or vision.

Jesus spoke of this incident not because Jonah was in the fish for three days, but because this was a common saying in his days about a man who is in difficulty. He spoke of Lazarus in heaven and the rich man in hell when the rich man asked Lazarus for a drop of water to quench his thirst. This was only a figurative way used by Eastern people to picture the bad men and the wicked rich who have acquired their fortune unjustly, as thirsty and suffering in hell. There are other similar parables in the Bible, as a warning to people. The importance of this story is in the miraculous conversion of the Assyrian king and his people by an humble prophet who was in difficulty in knowing how to carry out his orders from God. Jonah was divinely directed like all other prophets charged with a difficult mission.



THE UNCLEAN SPIRIT

When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none.

Matt. 12 : 43.

When the unclean spirit goes out of a man" is an Aramaic colloquialism meaning the man has been healed. It so happens, after men are healed, they continue to follow evil courses which produce even worse forms of sickness than the first. To say "the evil spirit returned and found the house empty, swept and garnished" means the man was now in a worse condition and the abode for sickness was permanent and secure. "He then took seven other spirits more wicked than himself" means the man now had a complication of diseases. That is, if the patient had insanity, now he has heart trouble, pneumonia and other diseases. It does not literally mean the unclean spirits abode in the man as though they had no other dwelling place but his latter state had become far worse than his former.

It is said by Assyrians when an unpopular man brings four or five guests with him, he has brought other evil spirits like himself. Luke 11 : 24.



PARABLE OF SEED

Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower.

Matt. 13 : 18.

According to the Eastern text it is "parable of the seed" and not of the sower. The Aramaic word for seed is *zara* and the word for sower is *zarua*. But this parable, both in the Western version and Eastern text, deals with seed falling in four kinds of soil and not about the sower who was instrumental in sowing the seed. This error was no doubt due to the similarity of the two Aramaic words.

The Southern part of Palestine, especially Judaea, is

hilly and rocky. Small patches of land are like gardens planted on the slopes of mountains; they are terraced one above the other. Each field is sustained by a little retaining wall built of stones. Usually the fields are very rocky and often soil is brought from elsewhere to cover the rocks. Large stones which cannot be removed are allowed to remain. In fact, some stones and rocks are intentionally left in the field to keep the soil from being washed away during the rainy season.

These hilly fields are difficult to cultivate, the soil being poor and the rocks plentiful. Some seeds fall on the rocks which are covered only with a thin layer of soil. The seed sprouts but in the heat of the day, the rocks become hot and the plant is scorched. Other seeds fall among the thorns which grow near the edge of the rocks in the field; the soil is deep, but as the thorns grow faster, the seed is choked and bears no fruit. Some seeds fall on the pathways, these seeds are snatched by the birds. All other seeds fall at the lower end of the field where the soil is fertile; the seeds grow and bring forth an abundant harvest. Luke 8 : 11.



RECANTING

*Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while:
for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the
word, by and by he is offended.* Matt. 13 : 21.

When a man changes his religion, he changes his customs and nationality. When a Christian becomes a Mohammedan, he must give up his swine because Mohammedans do not eat pork and he must also renounce other customs which are contrary to his adopted faith. The same course is followed when a Mohammedan becomes a Christian.

As religion is the great center of life in the Orient, such changes can not be effected without persecution and war. When a Mohammedan becomes an open believer in Jesus, he is immediately put to death by his own rela-

tives. Reading of the Christian gospel or words of a preacher may affect his heart and he may suddenly be filled with enthusiasm for the new gospel. He feels he can give his life for it but as soon as his relatives find out he has become a Christian, he takes the change of faith more seriously. Fear and threats compel him to recant and denounce the new faith.

Persecutions were to arise because of conversions to the Christian gospel. Christianity was to do away not only with ancient pagan religions but with their economic institutions. Merchants and artisans would not allow their trade and business to be endangered by the conversion to a new faith which disregarded material things. The converts themselves were at times disappointed and tired of the seemingly passive faith which they had adopted.



WHEAT AND TARES

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field:

But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. Matt. 13 : 24, 25.

The Aramaic word for tares is *zivaney* derived from *zana* which means to commit adultery. *Zivaney* or tares grow uncultivated. Even though they are carefully separated from the wheat seed, before it is sown, some tares spring up with the wheat to the farmer's dismay. This is due to the tares which survived in the ground from the previous harvest. In the spring, wheat and tares grow together but the tares grow faster and shoot their branches over the wheat, preventing the wheat from growing and ripening. At this stage it is very hard to pull out the tares because their tendrils are wound around the wheat. If the tares are pulled, the wheat will suffer. The work of separation must therefore wait until the harvest season.

In the East it is not unusual for one to throw seeds of tares in the field of another. During the sowing season farmers are very suspicious and afraid of each other, especially those with whom they have had quarrels and troubles. It takes years of hard labor for a farmer completely to eradicate the tares from his wheat. When this is done, the farmer rejoices. On the other hand, when an Eastern farmer wants to avenge a wrong done to him by a neighbor, he takes some tare seeds in a little bag or in his pocket and at night he scatters them on his enemy's field. When the tares spring up the owner of the field immediately realizes this is a dastard act of an enemy but he does not know which of his enemies. He does not hesitate to retaliate by scattering tares in several fields in the hope his enemy will suffer.

In this parable the wheat represents the good. Tares are the evil. Evil and good have always existed together. It is difficult to separate them because by punishing the bad, the good will also suffer. Evil and good therefore exist to the end but they will be separated at the last day just as the wheat and tares are separated at harvest time. The tares are burned with fire so they will not grow again and the wheat is stored in the barn. The good likewise will go to eternal rest and the wicked to the everlasting fire.



KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.

Matt. 13 : 33.

The kingdom of heaven in Aramaic is *malcotha dash-maya*. It means the universal kingdom, that is, the Messianic kingdom which was to embrace all people on earth and to restore the Davidic throne. The Jews were to be rulers. The realms of the Gentiles were to be over-

thrown forever and the people enslaved to the Jewish yoke. But even in this kingdom, the bad and the good would be found; like tares and wheat and the different kinds of fish in the net.

The kingdom of heaven refers to the universal earthly kingdom ruled by the prince of peace. It is different from the kingdom of God. The latter represents only the good but includes people of all races regardless of creed and color. The kingdom of God is to be in the future and God himself will be the ruler because eventually the good will overcome the evil just like leaven slowly ferments the bread dough. This is an eternal kingdom of peace and happiness forevermore. Mark 4 : 30; Luke 13 : 18, 19.



SPEAKING IN PARABLES

All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables; and without a parable spake he not unto them:

Matt. 13 : 34.

Speaking by parables is an oriental practice. In countries where the people are illiterate, understanding of the truth is conveyed by means of illustrations or parables. A parable is an oral picture which portrays and illustrates an event or a doctrine. Parables are familiar to the people and are composed by the speaker out of the incidents and experiences of his own life. The speaker first recites an incident corresponding to what he intends to say and as the incident is well known to the people, they easily grasp the meaning.

If what is to be said is of a serious nature, it is always preceded by a parable. This was the case with Nathan and David in the parable of the rich man with many sheep and the poor man with one lamb. Nathan related this parable to induce David to acknowledge his guilt. Without the parable, David would have been enraged at Nathan (2 Sam. 12 : 1). The easterner must understand completely. Things partially understood are exaggerated

or misconstrued. A wise man, therefore, not only talks by parables but he repeats the same thing again and again until he is convinced his words have impressed the minds of his listeners. A parable helps people to remember what has been said. Buying and selling is carried on by conversations in which parables are cited. Two men carrying burdens on their backs and going in opposite directions often halt and engage in conversation introducing several parables. Statesmen, politicians and prophets have always used parables in their conversations and heated debates. Parables were the chief medium for communications and this is so even today. Mark 4 : 33, 34.



BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF JESUS

Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?

And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? Matt. 13 : 55, 56.

The Jews were polygamists from the time of Abraham and still are in most Eastern countries. In some cases the Jewish law made it mandatory. For instance, if a brother should die leaving a wife and no posterity, his brother must marry her and bring a child to his deceased brother. Thus, even those who were content with one wife were often forced by circumstances to take another. On the other hand, wives in those days were considered property. Men with a number of wives were more respected and looked upon as wealthy.

There is no doubt Joseph had other wives. The brothers and sisters of Jesus who are mentioned in the Gospels were not Mary's children but children of Joseph by other wives. Had they been his own brothers and sisters, they would have stood by Jesus and not opposed him from the beginning. They were ashamed of his acts and remarks concerning his Messianic claims. So Jesus

left them and went to towns near the lake of Galilee. That is why the Gospel according to the Eastern text says "No prophet is insulted except by his own relatives and friends."

As none of the brothers and sisters of Jesus seem to have been with him when he was crucified, he placed his mother in the care of John. Had his brothers been his followers, they would have been near at this critical time and Jesus would have asked them to take care of his mother. Strange as it is, in the East, rivalry and bitterness are stronger between step-brothers than between strangers. Mark 6 : 3.



FALSE VISION

*And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea,
they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried
out for fear.* Matt. 14 : 26.

Demons and evil spirits play an important part in the life of Oriental people. Belief in unseen spirits is so ingrained that specific religious laws are enacted in their behalf. In some Mohammedan countries, even today, a woman's marriage to a spirit (gin) is recognized. Men and women hold communion with spirits; some declare these spirits were seen by them.

Fear of spirits is so strong, an innocent man walking at dark by the seashore or near a cemetery may be mistaken for a spirit. In Assyria, even though he can prove his identity, a large needle is plunged into a man who enters a house at night and is not recognized by a member of the family. When a needle touches an evil spirit, it is supposed to change into an ass. That is the belief.

The fear of the disciples was due to this strange belief but Jesus promptly assured them it was he and not a spirit.



RACIAL ANTIPATHY

And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Matt. 15 : 22, 23, 24.

Racial and religious feeling is strong in eastern lands. Rivalry and hatred dominate. Even though people of various races and religions live and trade together, they look upon each other as unclean. Priests of one religion condemn those of the other beliefs. Sympathy for or a kind word to any person by a religious leader of different faith is not tolerated by anyone.

When Jesus preached in the synagogue of Nazareth, he reminded the people of the famine in Israel when Elisha was sent to the widow of Zarephath in Syria to be fed and not to widows in Israel. He reminded them of Naaman, a Syrian, who was cleansed of his leprosy although many lepers in Israel were not healed. These remarks so enraged the people in the synagogue, they took Jesus to a cliff and tried to throw him over but he escaped.

Jesus had no feeling of enmity toward Gentiles though he was a member of Jewish faith and adhered to a certain degree to Jewish social customs and manners. A sudden departure from the established traditions would not only have roused the hatred of the Pharisees and priests but would also have weakened the faith of his followers. His motives would not have been understood even by his disciples and the public would have repudiated him as a traitor. This is the reason why Jesus sent his disciples first to the people of Israel. They were to be converted first so barriers could be broken and the principles of a universal brotherhood established. Mark 7 : 25.



LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES

Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.

Matt. 16 : 6.

Before bread is baked, women set aside a handful of dough as leaven to be mixed with the next day's supply. This is placed in a large wooden basin and hot water poured over it. When it is dissolved, the flour is mixed with the solution. The leaven causes the dough to ferment and while it is fermenting, it increases in bulk. Easterners believe the increase is caused by a sacred and hidden blessing in the family leaven. In their eyes leaven is sacred.

When men are on good terms, they bless the leaven of each other and are careful not to make slighting remarks against it in conversation but when men are disputing or fighting, they curse each other's leaven. One often hears, "Beware of him; he has grown up eating bread made of bad leaven." Again, "His leaven is bloody." When a man kills another, his leaven is defiled. No one in the town borrows from it or touches it. Some men and women are afraid even to eat bread made of such leaven. In Turkey Christians do not eat bread baked by the Jew because the Jews killed Jesus. The Jews do not eat cheese made by Christians or Mohammedans because the yeast that is used in making cheese is not kosher.

In conversation, the word leaven is not used literally. It signifies the teaching or policy of certain people. Just as leaven lightens and increases the dough, teaching enlightens a man's mind and changes his actions.

The teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees was bad leaven. It confused and poisoned the public mind. Their whole thought was centered on the foolish traditions of the Elders which were often the cause of schisms, hypocrisy and hatred. The leaven of these doctrines fermented in the Jewish mind to such an extent, the Jews lost their spiritual vision. The Pharisees and priests prayed with their lips but their hands were smeared with

the blood of the innocent. Extortion and graft dominated under the guise of ecclesiastical authority.

Jesus was careful his disciples were not misled and bewildered by these teachings. In the Jewish sense, the man they were following was neither a religious man nor a holy man because he ignored the doctrines of the elders and questioned Jewish theology. As the interest of the Jews centered solely in the Messianic political hopes expounded by the Pharisees and the priests, the simple disciples could easily have been misled. Luke 12 : 1.



WHO AM I?

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?
Matt. 16 : 13.

The Eastern text reads "What do the men say concerning me, that I am merely a son of man?" When an easterner enters a religious career or becomes prominent, he is the subject of public discussion. People strive to find out all they can about his ancestry, qualifications and mission. He is both praised and criticised. Some men describe him as a saint and give him a title appropriate to a holy man. Others look on him as a new prophet with a new message. And yet others scorn him and repudiate his claims.

Jesus' popularity was increasing rapidly. The Galileans had already proclaimed him a prophet and a king. The Jews in the south were constantly discussing him. The Pharisees and doctors of law were challenging his messianic claims. Some people thought he might be Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the other prophets come back. The Jews believed that Elijah would return to restore the Jewish state. Others openly disclaimed him and looked upon him merely as a Galilean.

Jesus had heard all these discussions and knew the

people were debating about him. He heard people say that he was only an ordinary man and that no prophet could arise in Galilee. He knew that all this had made an impression on his own disciples, and he therefore wanted to know what they thought of him. He asked them what people said concerning him, whether he was merely a human being or a prophet. Bar-nasha in Aramaic means son of man, a human being and an ordinary man. In the east a man who holds no title is simply known as an ordinary man. Mark 8 : 27; Luke 9 : 18.



SHEOL—HELL

And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Matt. 16 : 18.

The word *sheol* is probably derived from the Hebrew *shalal*, to be quiet, or the Aramaic *shla* to cease. The Semitic conception of Sheol is that of a place where people are quiet and inactive, where the souls of the departed abide until the resurrection day, patiently waiting for the sound of the last trumpet. The Aramaic and Hebrew word for hell is *gehenna*, a place prepared for the wicked. *Sheol* includes both the good and the bad until the judgment day. Hence the translation of *sheol* by *hades* or *hell* is incorrect, especially in the creeds. Jesus did not go to *gehenna* but to *sheol*. Hell is a place to be established after the judgment.

Hebrews thought that *sheol* was a place below the surface of the earth and beyond the jurisdiction of God. (Psalm 16 : 10). Jesus assured Peter that even *sheol* would be conquered by his followers and that God has power over everything. This idea does away with the thought of dualism and stresses the omnipotence of God.



THE KEYS

And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Matt. 16 : 19.

In Aramaic speech Keys are symbolical of power and trust. Faithful servants are generally entrusted with unlimited power. One often hears a lord say to his servant, "I give you the keys," which means, "I give you complete authority as overseer of my house." In the absence of their lord such servants are entrusted with unlimited powers. They are empowered to buy and sell, to lend and to collect debts, to forgive and to punish workers, to sign and repudiate agreements. To bind and to release means to enact new laws and to repeal others, to forgive and to punish.

Peter was a loyal disciple of Jesus. His faith was hard like a stone. He firmly believed that Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus appreciated his loyalty and confession, and entrusted him with unlimited power. He was empowered to make new laws for the new kingdom which would be established after his death. Peter had authority to make a new interpretation of the Scriptures and to write a new covenant in place of the old. This power was also granted to other disciples who remained loyal to the new gospel.



EPILEPTIC—FIRE

Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water. Matt. 17 : 15.

Epilepsy is quite prevalent in eastern countries and its victims are exposed to unfortunate accidents by fire or water. When this epileptic boy was seized with spells, he fell into the fire place. Such accidents are quite com-

mon because an oriental house contains one or several ovens, dug in the floor, for the cooking of food and the baking of bread. The ovens are often left uncovered and sometimes members of the household as well as strangers fall into them and are severely burned. This is what happened to the epileptic boy in his own house.

EPILEPTIC—WATER

Where towns are situated near valleys, brooks, streams and small rivers run through them. In the spring time, when water overflows, crossing becomes dangerous as in most towns, bridges are not found. Rivers are crossed by wading in the water. Stones are placed at some points in the streams so that people can step from one to the other. Women and children often fall and are carried along by the current. Parents of children are in constant fear of the water. Epileptic children, falling in the water while crossing, at times are even drowned. Feeble and aged people are helped by their friends. Such mishaps seldom take place in American towns where bridges are common. Mark 9 : 22.



JESUS PAID HEAD-TAX

And when they were come to Capernaum, they that received tribute money came to Peter, and said, Doth not your master pay tribute?

Matt. 17 : 24.

The eastern text reads "Would not your master give his two coins?" Peter replied "Yes." The reference was to the head-tax paid by every male. It consisted of two coins of silver and no one was exempt from this levy with the probable exception of the high priest and a few privileged Jewish officials in the Roman service. In the east, people are taxed in their home towns. When

traveling, the tax collector has no authority to force payment of taxes and so many people go to other towns to escape making payment. As the government has no means of identifying the people, because they have no passports or birth certificates, the work of the tax collectors becomes difficult and expensive.

It seems the tax collectors had a hard time to find Jesus and his disciples in their native towns because they were traveling constantly. On this occasion the tax collectors found them in Capernaum and took advantage by trying to collect the tax. Jesus could have deferred payment on the ground he was traveling and could have asked them to see him in Nazareth, his home town, but he knew this would cause them delay and annoyance so Jesus ordered Peter to make the payment. Mark 12 : 14.



JESUS EARNS

Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money; that take, and give unto them for me and thee.

Matt. 17 : 27.

This is another puzzling Aramaic idiom and a figurative saying which cannot be easily translated into other languages. "You will find a shekel in the mouth of a fish" means, you will easily catch a fish and sell it for a shekel. An easterner often says, "There are ten dollars in the horn of my ox" which means, my ox can be sold for ten dollars. "There is a dollar in each one of my lambs" means each lamb can be sold for a dollar. Then again, when things are easily and unexpectedly acquired, it is said, "I have found the money."

The tax collectors demanded that Jesus and Peter pay their head taxes. They had no money and the only thing to do was for Peter to go and fish in the lake. He was a fisherman by trade. Jesus told him to go and assured him

that the first catch would be worth a shekel, sufficient to meet the taxes for both of them. The fish was either sold or given to the tax collector. In the east families who are unable to pay in cash provide food and lodging for tax collectors as payment. At times, they pay in butter or cheese instead of coins, according to the principle of barter. As taxes are often levied by local officials without the knowledge of the central government, tax collectors are glad to accept whatever they can exact.

This explanation of an Aramaic idiom does not in the least depreciate the miraculous power of Jesus who raised the dead and performed great works for the benefit of others but he never used his divine power for himself.



LIKE LITTLE CHILDREN

And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them,

And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Matt. 18 : 2, 3.

Little children are free from many habits which adults have acquired. They are natural and trustful because they know nothing of deception and diplomacy. They say what they mean and believe what they hear. They have no fear and are not worried about the future. They know their parents take care of them and do not fail to meet their daily needs no matter how poor they are. This is the trust a child has in loving parents.

Men are to trust their heavenly Father like little children trust parents. They must do away with greed and selfishness because the Father will never fail to provide for their needs. They must trust him just as a little child trusts his mother and never questions her wisdom. Mark 10 : 13; Luke 18 : 16.



THE CONGREGATION

And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Matt. 18 : 17.

The Eastern text reads: "Tell it to the congregation" instead of "Tell it to the Church" as rendered in the King James version. The term church was of later usage and not known in the early days. *Eta* in Aramaic means group, or congregation, composed of elders and town counsellors who generally arbitrate disputes and settle quarrels, and pass judgment on legal matters.

Nomads as well as inhabitants in small country places, are governed by a group of elders selected from among themselves. These elders are also members of the chief's cabinet who advise on tribal matters. They sit in judgment and pronounce sentences of punishment.

When peaceful means fail to bring settlement between the parties involved, the case is brought before one or two of the Elders, and when the guilty is discovered, he is admonished and chastised or punished.

In the wilderness, Moses selected a group of elders to act as judges, but important cases were submitted to him as chief justice (Exod. 19 : 25ff; Deut. 22 : 18). This custom still prevails in many Eastern countries where the Patriarch acts as chief justice, and the bishops and ministers are the judges. Smaller cases are arbitrated by lay members.



WORTHY

Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.

Matt. 18 : 19.

The Aramaic word *neshtvon* means "worthy of", and not "when two of you agree on anything", as translated in the King James version. It means the prayer of

a group of people or a congregation will be granted if two men among them are worthy, but if no one is found worthy, the request will be refused.

When Abraham appealed to God on behalf of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, God told him if ten men were found to be righteous in those cities, he would spare them. Not even one was found to be righteous and so the cities were destroyed by fire. (Genesis 18 : 32.)

God grants requests of those who ask him if they are worthy of what they ask. At times he refuses to grant requests, not because the things asked for are not needed but because the petitioners are not trustworthy.



IN HIS NAME

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them. Matt. 18 : 20.

As newspapers, books and other interests are unknown in the east, religion is the chief topic of conversation. Whenever two or three men gather together or when two easterners meet, the first question is, what is your religion? Politics have little or no hold on the life of eastern people. Religious discussions are carried on, not so much because eastern people are very religious but because that is the liveliest and most popular subject. During these religious discussions, the names of God and Jesus are constantly repeated and so they serve as a source of instruction to common and illiterate folk who sit down and listen. This is, however, not always the case. At times the devil also is present and a friendly discussion may end in a heated argument possibly followed by quarrels and murders.

The truth always prevails. During and after these debates, men and women are converted. It is interesting to note that in the early centuries, conversions were chiefly made through debates and not through universities, schools and churches. Missionaries stood on street

corners and spoke about Jesus and his works. Sometimes they were welcome and as a result of their talks and discussions many souls were won to Christ. On other occasions, the meetings were broken by violence and the missionaries thrown into prison. During the trials, even judges and governors were given opportunity to listen to the story of the Master.



LEAVING PARENTS

And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh?
Matt. 19 : 5.

The Aramaic word *nishbook* here means separate; a man separates from his father and his mother to live with his wife.

Even though disputes and quarrels are constant in Oriental families, the family unity is mostly maintained. Sons seldom leave or even think of leaving parents. Even after they are married and have grown children, they continue to live with them. Death alone separates a man from his father and mother. There are, however, some exceptions to this rule. Daughters-in-law often quarrel with the mother-in-law. If the family relations become too strained, some sons put their wives away and remain with their parents; others leave their parents and go with their wives in which case the family property is divided between the son and his father. To leave father and mother may mean to live apart but under the same roof and it may also mean to leave the family house and live in another house in the same town. Leave does not mean to sever relationships. After the separation of households, father and son work together, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law visit and food is sent from one family to the other.

Jesus recognized these strong family ties but pointed out how much better it was for a man to separate from

his parents than to leave or divorce his wife. Marriage is sacred. Mark 10 : 7.



LITTLE CHILDREN

Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should put his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. Matt. 19 : 13.

Little children are loved and carefully treated in Europe and America. Not so in the East. Although men and women love their children, especially sons, at times they punish them severely and even curse them. Children lack training because parents seldom teach them anything, good manners and cleanliness included. They are neglected and frequently form bad habits as they grow. It is common to see children at home and on the streets with unwashed faces and dirty clothes.

When an honorable guest is entertained, an Oriental house is swept before the arrival and the children and beggars sent outside with instructions not to return until the banquet is over. Parents who are kind and gentle toward their children, send them to a neighbor's house. The servants of the host and the guest keep steady vigilance to prevent undue noises and the entrance of people with dirty clothes and little children with dirty faces. When children are permitted to be present, their acts often cause embarrassment and annoyance to the guests. Children not only listen to the conversation but also ask foolish questions or make embarrassing remarks. They would not hesitate to ask the guest what girl he desired to marry if they thought the gathering was for a marriage purpose. On such occasions, women sit apart in one corner of the house, listening to the conversation and occasionally casting a secret glance at the honorable guest and those sitting around him.

Custom is different when a holy man visits a town and

is entertained. Then, every man seizes the opportunity to present his boys that he may lay hands on them, bless them, and protect them from disease. Children know he is a holy man and keep quiet in his presence.

In the eyes of his disciples, Jesus was a king rather than a prophet. Until the time of his death, they were patiently waiting for him to restore the lost kingdom of David. That is why they rebuked the children and the people who brought them. In the eyes of the simple men and women whom Jesus visited, he was a holy man, a man of God, and so the children were brought to him. They did not consider him a political ruler even though they also expected the kingdom of God on earth.

Jesus told his disciples to permit the little boys to come because to such as they was the kingdom of heaven revealed. The boys were simple-minded, free from dogmatic traditions, and had hatred for none. They knew nothing of political kingdoms or the difference between the Roman Empire and the kingdom of David. Only men as free from religious and political prejudices as these boys could understand the realm of God. Jesus further wanted his disciples to realize children were the future recruits of his kingdom. Mark 10 : 13; Luke 18 : 15.



WONDERFUL TEACHER

And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. Matt. 19 : 17.

T*ava* in Aramaic is an adjective meaning good, wonderful, well and righteous. In this case it means wonderful. When easterners marvel at the extraordinary, the actor or performer is called wonderful. The word "tava" refers to personal occupation as well as character. A good shepherd is called *raya tava*. *Raya bisha* means bad shepherd. A shepherd may be a murderer or crook but he is still known as a *raya tava* because he under-

stands his sheep and knows how to take care of them. When an article or animal is sold, its owner says *tava eleh* which means it is wonderful or good.

This man called Jesus *malpana tava*, wonderful teacher, referring to his preaching. Everyone was astonished at his eloquent utterances and even his enemies, the Pharisees, wondered at this remarkable Nazarene. As a token of appreciation for his teaching, this man addressed Jesus "wonderful teacher". Jesus was always reluctant to accept compliments and his reply was that "malpana tava" was appropriate only to God, the source of all power. Jesus declared only the Father knew all things. Luke 10 : 25.



SHARING

Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. Matt. 19 : 21.

Sell everything and give to the poor" should not be taken literally, nor does it apply to all who have wealth. These words were addressed to religious men who sought to gain eternal life by means of their riches.

In the East, when men decide to devote all their time to religion, they renounce their riches and all material interests, and have no thought of pecuniary compensation. They do this largely because in the East wealth consists of sheep and cattle and not of stocks and bonds. To continue to own possessions, a man must give all his thought to their care and seek pasture for his flocks. A religious man cannot do this and preach the Gospel nor could he take all this wealth from one city to another. When Elisha followed Elijah he sacrificed his oxen and destroyed his plough because he could not attend to farming and become a great prophet as he did. (I Kings 19 : 21.)

Religious men are thus supported by what they receive

as tithes from their followers. Some of these men are in charge of shrines and get large incomes which they distribute to the poor. There are no charitable societies in the East, and the poor are cared for by their relatives and friends, and at times by pious men. Many of the priests, however, insist that gifts should be made to churches and shrines, rather than to the poor. When the incomes at these places increased there was the outcry that the poor were neglected. And some of the prophets went so far as to declare that God did not want offerings, but that justice should be done.

This rich young man was thinking of becoming an active religious man and had been trained to give to the Temple. Jesus knew where such money went and had seen the luxuries of the high priests. This is why he instructed him to give his wealth to the poor and not to the Temple. This is what every Eastern missionary does when he preaches the Gospel. Jesus did not mean that all wealth should be given to the poor. It is just like knowledge. It cannot be given away or divided, but must be shared.



THE RICH MAN

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 19 : 23.

A rich man is hated and despised in the East. He is the target of preachers, prophets and politicians, and the topic of critical discussion among the poor and oppressed. This is because a rich man in the Orient seldom acquires his wealth by hard work, honest business or a profession. It is generally amassed by unjust means, such as bribery, extortion and confiscation.

Strange as it may seem, when a man acquires riches he is soon promoted by the government officials. His

property is exempt from taxation, he is granted certain privileges, and he is often appointed to collect taxes for the government on a profit basis. This practice results in unjust exactions, and the oppression causes discontent and bitterness among the poor. Then again, when government officials or another rich man visits a town, the rich man who lives in it entertains them at the expense of the people, whose sheep and animals are ruthlessly confiscated and killed to entertain the guests. The visitors are also presented with gifts of money, rugs or other valuable articles, which are also forcibly taken from the town people. The parable which Nathan related to David, and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus clearly illustrates the greed of these rich men. (2 Samuel 12 : 1ff; Luke 16 : 19ff.)

In times of depression and famine, rich men collect sheep and wheat from their subjects so that their wealth might not be reduced, and their power lost. It is also said that "the rich man is blessed by God", but many men do not wait for God to bless them but really bless themselves by injustice. These are the kind of men whom Jesus condemned, and not the righteous men who were prospered by God. They were like Ahab whom Elijah condemned because he had confiscated Naboth's vineyard (I Kings 21 : 1ff).

There is another type of Oriental rich men who acquire wealth and property during prosperous years, but distribute it to the poor in the lean years. They accumulate immense wealth but hold it in trust for the people. Such rich men live on the level of the people and in times of famine, they are ready to give up everything and even die with their people who love and worship them. Jesus had friends among the rich like Joseph of Arimathaea, Zacchaeus and many others. It was not wealth Jesus condemned but the methods by which it was acquired and the greed in hoarding it. Wealth will always accumulate in the hands of some people but they must remember they are God's stewards and should use it for good purposes.



THE NEEDLE AND THE ROPE

And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. Matt. 19 : 24.

The Aramaic word *gamla* means camel, a large rope and a beam. The meaning of the word is determined by its context. If the word riding or burden occurs then *gamla* means a camel, but when the eye of a needle is mentioned *gamla* more correctly means a rope. There is no connection anywhere in Aramaic speech or literature between camel and needle, but there is a definite connection between rope and needle. Eastern women when purchasing thread often say, "It is a rope, I cannot use it", which means it is too thick. Then again, there are ropes in every Eastern home, used to tie up burdens on the backs of men and of animals. When not used, the rope is hung on the wall or laid in a corner of the house.

The discussion about the rich man probably took place in the house. Jesus pointed to the rope in the house to illustrate what he was saying in condemning the greed of Eastern rich men, who had acquired their wealth unjustly. He said, "It is easier for a rope to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God". Then again there are different kinds of needles in use in the East: the tiny needle for fine embroidery, the common needle for sewing which is larger, and the big needle about five or seven inches long, which working men often carry fastened to their garments or attached to the rope. A good sized cord could easily be passed through this needle, which is used chiefly for sewing large bags, rugs and tents woven of goat's hair.

Biblical students have suggested that when Jesus referred to "needle eye" he meant the little gate in the wall. As there is no such gate in any oriental city called "needle eye" where camels could pass through, this interpretation is incorrect. Some of the ancient walled cities in the east still remain the same as in the ancient

days. They have several large entrances at various parts of the wall known as "gates." Men, camels and all animals enter and leave through them. They are the only possible place a camel could enter. The Gospel says nothing of such a gate and plainly refers to the eye of a needle. *Dadlil lgamla lmeal bakhroa damgata au atira dneaol lmacootha dalaha* means "It is easier for a rope to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

The word *gamla* is also used in Matthew 23 : 24, but here it means camel because Jesus was talking about *baka*, gnat, and contrasting it with camel. In this case, both objects were alive and the hyperbole was justified, as it would not have been in Matt. 19 : 24 which would have made no sense. Everybody in the Orient knows that a camel could never pass through a needle's eye, but that a rope might at least be forced through the eye of a large needle.

Such expressions as rope and needle, camel and gnat, are common in Eastern usage, but the comparison or contrast must have some connection, otherwise the illustration would be meaningless. The repetition of some Aramaic words in widely differing contexts is largely due to a limited vocabulary. Aramaic is an ancient language, and the Gospels were written at a time when languages did not require a large vocabulary and new ideas were not prevalent. The art of writing was practically recent and printing was invented in Europe fourteen centuries later. Mark 10 : 25; Luke 18 : 25.



WAGES FOR LABORERS

And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. Matt. 20 : 2.

Dinara was the smallest monetary unit. It is still used by the Irak government but it has a greater value. A dinara is equal to a penny. Some commentators, un-

familiar with labor conditions in the east, place a larger value on this piece of money.

The owner of the vineyard paid the laborers a dinara each. This may sound hard and unbelievable to Americans who are accustomed to being highly remunerated for their services. Nevertheless, in many eastern countries unskilled vineyard workers are now paid only a few cents a day and in Kurdistan and some parts of Mesopotamia, servants and shepherds are still hired for a few dollars a year and their food. Before the world war men could be hired for less than a dollar a year and food. A dinara (penny) may look small in the United States where money is abundant but in some parts of the east, a dinara can purchase more than a dollar can purchase in the United States. Labor unions are unknown. Laborers work for what they can get and employers pay what they can. Both laborer and employer are just trying to make a living. When a laborer is very poor, his employer takes care of his family during hard times.



JEALOUSY

*Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?
Is thine eye evil, because I am good?* Matt. 20 : 15.

Jealousy and envy are characteristics of eastern people. They are indifferent to the possessions of foreign people but they envy each other. Nothing hurts a man more than to see his neighbor treated with the same favor and respect as he is, especially in the matter of money and wages. A poor man is happier without help than to see his neighbor receive the same gifts.

As clocks and watches are unknown in many parts of the East, there is no way to keep track of the hours. Laborers go to work at any time they awake and leave at sunset. The wages are so small, most field and vineyard owners disregard the time worked and pay the

laborers equally, not because they are lenient toward those who have been hired late but because there is no time record and they know a laborer depends on the small wages he earns to support his family. This impartiality and generosity of payment often causes dissension but it is soon forgotten.



COLT AND ASS

And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples.

Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto me. Matt. 21 : 1, 2.

In the East, asses are used extensively for transportation in countries where modern civilization has not penetrated and where horses and mules cannot travel the narrow roads and ragged mountains. Some families have as many as seven or ten asses, kept in the fields or tied outside the door waiting to be burdened. If just arrived with a caravan, the owners unload and feed them near the entrance of the house.

The Easterner has his ass just as the American has his car. They are much like taxicabs, ready to be hired or loaned to friends when needed. Government officials and soldiers, traveling from town to town, draft the asses to carry supplies. Notable men and holy men have the privilege of using the animals at any time. It is quite an honor to lend an ass to be ridden by a holy man. The owners gently reply, "Take it, kill it if you wish, it is yours, you don't need to ask me".

Everybody, including his disciples, expected Jesus to restore the kingdom of Israel. Instead, he continually repudiated all talk to a temporal reign and tried to impress upon the people, his kingdom was not of this world. Jesus wanted to enter Jerusalem humbly and

meekly and try further to destroy these rumors. It was on this journey the sons of Zebedee requested permission to sit one on his right and the other on his left hand in the kingdom. So, when Jesus arrived at Bethphage, he sent his disciples to bring an ass and a colt from the nearby village. The ass was brought because the colt was not broken and could not be separated from its mother. An earthly king or ruler would have despised the ass and would have ridden a mule or a horse to enter Jerusalem. Jesus rode the colt which no man had ridden before. Eventually he was rejected by the people. Mark 11 : 2; Luke 19 : 3.



RIDING ON AN ASS

Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.
Matt. 21 : 5.

When Oriental kings and princes enter a city the streets are cleaned, roads repaired, tapestries hung on the buildings, and rugs spread on the streets. Easterners are very lavish and generous on such occasions.

A delegation composed of the governor, noblemen and priests, accompanied by a large crowd leaves the city to greet and escort the royal guests. A handsome horse saddled with expensive livery, embroidered with silk and gold, is offered as a token of the city's hearty welcome. The Hebrews used the mule on such occasions, as a symbol of strength. (I Kings, 1 : 33.)

An ass is a symbol of disgrace and humiliation in Eastern countries; it is never used by princes and noblemen, but only by the very poor. Nor would such an animal be offered to a distinguished visitor. In the East when a person is punished for his heretical views or some other cause reflecting on his moral character, he is set on an ass and taken through the town. This custom still prevails.

Before starting on his journey to Jerusalem, Jesus predicted his rejection, humiliation and death. He knew he would not be welcome in the Holy City, and that the priests were waiting to disgrace him and send him to the Cross in the presence of the people who expected him to be a king. This is why he chose an ass instead of a mule like the kings of Judah. "Tell the daughter of Sion thy King cometh to thee." This sudden departure from the custom grieved the disciples especially Judas, and brought fears to the others. Jesus desired to show that he did not want to be received as an earthly king, and that his disciples should not expect a royal welcome from the Jerusalemites. He rode on the ass on his own initiative before the Jews would set him on one.

On arriving at the Mount of Olives, they were greeted by a group of Galileans who had come early to the Feast. They had no rugs or other objects of beauty to lay under his feet, and so they spread their garments as a token of welcome and loyalty to him and as a rebuke to the Jews who shunned him. The little innocent children sang before him unaware of the hostility of the leaders. The disciples themselves were shocked when they saw no Jewish delegation to greet him and when the Pharisees wanted Jesus to silence the children who were singing before him. This was doubtless one reason why Judas was led to revolt and turn traitor.

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem was a political failure. He was ignored by the leaders and priests of the historic city. Instead of being welcomed by the governor and the high priest and entertained in their palaces, his disciples had to seek a place to eat and lodge at Bethany. On passover evening they had to sleep in Gethsemane, which was a public park. On the other hand his entry into Jerusalem was a spiritual and moral triumph. He was soon to be crowned an everlasting king. The temporal forces were to fall down before the power of the new kingdom. The traditions of the elders were to be supplanted by the teaching of the new Gospel. Mark 11 : 7; Luke 19 : 35.



REMOVE MOUNTAINS

Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. Matt. 21 : 21.

General statements in the gospel should not be taken literally. Extravagant expressions are very frequent in Aramaic and Hebrew speech but never cause misunderstanding because the people know the speaker does not mean exactly what he says.

Emphasis is on the power of faith and that power cannot be measured. The Aramaic word *hamanotha*, faith, can also be translated, trust. *Mhemna*, believer, can mean trustworthy. Neither Jesus nor his disciples removed or attempted to remove mountains and Jesus did not actually mean mountains could be removed. Jesus emphasized trust in self and the power of trust. Trust in God's power and worthiness of purpose can accomplish the seemingly impossible. Without the determination to succeed, the courage to surmount obstacles, hard work and absolute faith in God and man, the vision of the Panama Canal could not have become an accomplished reality. Mark 11 : 23.



THE CORNERSTONE

Jesus saith unto them, Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Matt. 21 : 42.

When an Oriental plans to build a house, he first gathers stones, cuts beams and acquires other building materials. He then hires laborers or contracts with builders to construct his house. In the latter case

the materials, especially the unhewn stones, are examined before the contract is settled. Generally the large rough stones are rejected because they are hard to lift and place in the wall but the owner of the house insists the large stones be used in the building, arguing it has taken money and hard labor to get them. He also suspects the builders reject the large stones because they are unwilling to bother with them. The builders finally decide to use the large and unhewn stones for the foundation and place the largest stone at the corner. It is covered with earth and is hardly seen in the building but it serves a good purpose in the foundation of the wall.

Jesus pictures himself as a cornerstone. In the eyes of the Jews he was untrained, uncultured and irreligious. He was to be rejected by the Jewish high priests and elders who were the builders of the church of his Father but he was to be the founder of a universal religion and become the cornerstone of the true spiritual structure.

What men select is often rejected by God and what God selects, men often reject. Man's eyes see the outer appearance but the eyes of God look within. It is not beauty but service which counts just as the large unhewn stone, buried in the foundation of a building, is more important than a small polished stone high in the wall because the weight of the whole superstructure rests upon its foundation. Mark 12 : 10.



LARGE AND SMALL STONES

*And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken:
but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.*
Matt. 21 : 44.

Masons in the Orient lack iron and steel tools such as hammers, chisels, etc. Most builders cut one stone with another. A large stone is lifted with both hands and thrown on a small stone to break it into pieces. Some

builders break a small stone by striking it against a large stone.

This is an Aramaic parabolic saying which is used to the present day. The small stone is the weak man and the large stone is the strong man. When a weak man attacks a strong man, the weak is defeated and when a strong man attacks a weak man, again the weak is defeated. This parable also applies to the Roman empire in relation to Judaea and other small kingdoms succumbing to the power of Rome. When Rome attacked a small state, she defeated it and when a small kingdom revolted, it was subdued and destroyed just like a small stone is broken and scattered when struck against a large stone.

When truth and error contend, eventually error is destroyed and truth is established. Luke 20 : 18.



THE BIDDEN GUESTS

*The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king,
which made a marriage for his son,*

And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come.

Matt. 22 : 2, 3.

A king is a large landowner, in Aramaic called *malick*. Invitations to marriage feasts are issued suddenly. No announcements are sent to those invited but the news is carried verbally by messengers. Some guests doubt the truth of the invitation and ignore it. Others, due to strained relations between ruler and subjects, refuse to attend and sometimes conspire against him.

This parable was a direct attack upon the Pharisees and Sadducees who considered themselves better and more righteous than others. They were the invited guests who failed to come to the wedding feast. They rejected Jesus, killed him and proved unworthy of God's mercy. The Gentiles were then the invited guests of the

kingdom and their readiness to accept the invitation of Jesus made them the cornerstone of the gospel of Jesus.



A WEDDING GARMENT

And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment:

And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.

Matt. 22 : 11, 12.

Clothes are very scarce in the East and only the rich can have more than one garment. Styles similar to those of Europe and America are unknown and even though the climate changes, people wear the same clothing. In Palestine and Syria, one seldom sees a change of clothes during the whole year.

A few workers have an extra garment for Sunday, holidays and weddings. It is similar to the one worn daily but it is kept clean. Except for young men, noblemen, and the rich, who wear different clothes when they are not working, the working garments are worn throughout the year.

It is against eastern etiquette to go to a wedding or banquet without a clean garment. It is an insult to the host. Servants always look at a man's garments before allowing him to enter the house. A man who does not have a new garment borrows one from his neighbor. Borrowing of clothing and jewelry is very common among eastern people and, on occasions, everybody is generous. Women lend silver and gold bracelets and necklaces as well as expensive garments. When the Jews left Egypt, they borrowed all the garments and jewelry they could obtain from the Egyptians, pretending to need them for the feast. (Exodus 12 : 35.)

Some men who have no regard for etiquette, neglect to wear a clean garment. They either do not wish to be under obligation to their neighbors by borrowing gar-

ments or they are too lazy to change. Also, as banquets and weddings are usually held in the evening, men find it hard to change their garments after work. There is little privacy in an eastern home. Five or six families live in the same house and it is a problem to dress and undress. Some men would rather be humiliated by being turned away at the door of the wedding feast than undress before the many women in the house. It is not so difficult in the morning when men rise early. While they are dressing, the women are asleep or cover their heads.

The man who was turned away at the wedding probably had a new garment but did not try to change for the occasion. Jesus relates this parable in connection with preparation for the kingdom of God. Men must develop the highest character by reliance on God if they are to enter the kingdom.




HEAD-TAX

Tell us therefore, What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? Matt. 22 : 17.

The gospels say nothing about the circumstances under which this tribute or tax was levied and the objections of the Jews to paying it. The Eastern text correctly states this was a head-tax and not a tribute. All citizens of the Roman Empire were compelled to pay taxes on property and tribute was paid by states which were protectorates but retained independence. This tribute was levied on the people by their own rulers. Hezekiah, King of Judah, paid tribute to Sennacherib, King of Assyria (2 Kings 18 : 14). Tributes were taken out of the royal treasury and collected from the people.

The Jews did not resent the payment of taxes on property but they vigorously objected to paying a personal head-tax because head-taxes were paid on sheep and cattle. A head-tax exacted by a temporal power was

regarded as religiously unlawful by the Jew. His only allegiance was to God as the supreme ruler of the State and his payment of two shekels was made to the temple treasury. Jewish kings were the servants of Jehovah but as the Roman Emperors were worshipped as gods, head-tax would be idolatry. Today head-tax is resented in the East and some governments, to avoid trouble, call a head-tax by other names. Mark 12 : 14; Luke 20 : 22.




SADDUCEES

The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, Matt. 22 : 23.

The Aramaic word for Sadducees is *zadokaye*, derived from the Aramaic word, *zadak*, meaning righteous or one who appears to be righteous.

The Sadducees laid emphasis on purity of life rather than on dogmatic theology and traditions. They had no use for ritual and ceremony as did the Pharisees and priests. They were rationalists in their outlook on life and religion. They wanted peace and plenty on this earth and were not concerned about what was in store for them in the other world. Thus they denied the resurrection of the body. The Sadducees were content with the Roman rule in Judaea and did their best to uphold the faith of their forefathers. The Pharisees were nationalists. They believed the promises which God made to their forefathers would be fulfilled, if not in this world then in the next. They believed Messianic rule would overthrow the Roman Empire and the Davidic reign would be established in Palestine. They believed those who died without seeing this future kingdom would be partakers of it in their posterity, or if they died without children were cut off from its benefit. The Resurrection was thus an important part of their religious belief.



SON OF DAVID

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them,

*Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?
They say unto him, The son of David. Matt. 22 : 41, 42.*

According to Jewish concept of the Messianic kingdom, the Messiah must be a physical descendant of David in order to restore Israel to her former glory. Israel not only prospered under David's reign but was also recognized as a nation by the surrounding people. The division between the north and south after David's death strained the relations between the ten tribes of Israel and Judah, and endangered Israel's aspirations for national greatness. Both Judah and Israel lost prestige and finally succumbed to foreign powers.

After the return from the Babylonian captivity, a second temple was built with the hope of rebuilding the nation but all attempts to restore the dignity and power of Israel were futile. Many political attempts were made to free the Jews from foreign yoke but all were in vain. Israel had now come in contact with great empires like Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome and deliverance from these nations called for a nationalistic and courageous leader like David. The Jews looked for the Messiah to free them from foreign yoke and subjugate the nations of the earth and the Messiah must come from the house of David. No other Jewish family could take this honor because the Messianic promises were too sacred to be bestowed on any ordinary family.

The Jews were puzzled about Jesus. They did not know what to make of him. They recognized his power as a miracle worker and as a prophet who was inspired by some power but they could not connect him in any way with the house of David or even the tribe of Judah. This was largely because Jesus was a Galilean and Galileans, even though they were members of the Jewish faith, were hated by the Jews.

Jesus knew most of the opposition against him was

chiefly due to his nationality and not to his teaching. He heard them discussing him and so he asked, "What do you say concerning the Christ? Whose son is he?" The reply was "Son of David". Jesus contradicted this literal interpretation by another question from the Scriptures: "How then doth David in Spirit call him Lord?" For he said, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool." (Psalm 110 : 1.) "If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" Jesus knew this scriptural term was misunderstood. To Jesus "son of David" meant like David in courage, zeal and greatness and not necessarily in descent. In the east a famous man is always known as the son of a famous man who may have died centuries before him. This is so even in America. A great president would be called a son of Washington or Lincoln to imply their spirit is in him and that he followed their example. Mark 12 : 35; Luke 20 : 41.



FATHER AND RABBI

But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.

And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Matt. 23 : 8, 9.

Rabbi is derived from the Aramaic word *rab*, chief. The final letter signifies possessive case, my chief. *Rabba* means great. Priests and teachers like to be and are generally called *Rabbi*.

The term, "my father", has many meanings and is commonly used. First, it is a term of respect; a stranger will greet another and a master may address his servant in this manner. A father sometimes calls his little boy "my father" and then it is a term of endearment. Again, "father" and "rabbi" are titles used to convey honor and distinction and sometimes they are used in an effort to deceive.

This common usage was depreciated by Jesus because

it was often meaningless and detracted the thoughts of the people away from the heavenly Father.

ONE IS YOUR FATHER

Easterners who are not Christians still have many wives because polygamy prevails in all Moslem lands with the exception of Turkey. The family unity is centered in the father. The mother's side is unimportant. In a family there is only one father, many mothers and the children of all the mothers. Some of the women may have been previously married and have children by husbands of a different race and religion. The ties of relationship between such children is very weak.

The Jews have one God who is the Father of the race and racial unity and interest were based on him. This was not so with pagan people. They had many gods, and were divided and disorganized.



FALSE PRAYERS

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.

Matt. 23 : 14.

A woman had no rights in the Orient.* She was denied the right to own property and to sell or buy. Should a husband die leaving no male issue, his property automatically went to his nearest male relative. If there was a male issue, the woman was permitted to become the custodian of the property on condition a male guardian was appointed to transact the necessary business for her. Most women selected a priest or a religious man to discharge this sacred trust. As women led secluded lives,

*These customs prevail now in most all Eastern states. Turkey is the one country where great changes affecting women's rights are now taking place.

most widows found it difficult to know whom to trust. They therefore observed the prayer practice of the men in the church or synagogue and made a choice from those who prayed longest. Men keenly desired to become guardians of widows and orphans and as they were aware of this test, the insincere and dishonest often became the choice of widows because they spread out their prayer for the sake of appearance and put on the dress and the airs of piety without any reality. When this happened, the property of widows was often stolen or embezzled.

Jesus knew all this from close observation. He rightly condemned the hypocrisy of the unworthy and commended the virtue of the true. Compare his parable of the Pharisee and the publican and his words about the poor widow. (Luke 18 : 9ff; 21 : 1ff.)



MEASURE OF THE FATHERS

*Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are
the children of them which killed the prophets.
Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers.*

Matt. 23 : 31, 32.

People are judged by parents and ancestors. A good man is always known as the son of a good man. The Aramaic word *bni*, sons, also means descendants and dwellers. The Pharisees were the descendants of the Jews who had murdered the prophets and had inherited the virtues and vices of their forefathers. They knew their ancestors did not walk in the way of the Lord and that they had murdered his prophets but, instead of turning from the ways of their forefathers, they tried to please God by building tombs to the prophets whom their fathers had slain. At the same time they continued hostile towards the prophets. They were soon to add Jesus to the list of prophets of God, destroyed for preaching

social justice. Jesus condemned this hypocrisy. He did not tell them to continue in the evil ways of their fathers as the King James Version indicates. He really accused them of doing it.



THE LAST DAY

And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. Matt. 24 : 6, 7.

In the east, famine is caused by revolutions and wars, and by the destruction of crops by locusts or drought. During wars and revolutions, crops suffer severely. Green fields are used for grazing by invading forces, wheat fields ripen and are burned, trees are cut down and vineyards are made desolate. Owing to this destruction, both men and animals suffer.

Famine, caused by natural catastrophes of drought and locusts, affects only certain regions of the land. Other parts escape disaster. The inhabitants of destroyed territories die of starvation because lack of roads and facilities prevent the transportation of supplies. Wheat might be abundant only thirty or forty miles from the famine-stricken towns but it cannot be transported. Central governments do not render assistance to suffering subjects.

Christ foretold the fall of Jerusalem, preceded by revolutions and wars. Destruction of crops and trees, and exhaustion of food supplies were to follow the downfall of the holy city and the destruction of the Temple. The people who were not consumed by famine would die by the sword. Mark 13 : 8; Luke 21 : 11.



ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION

When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand :) Matt. 24 : 15.

When a city is besieged by an invading army its inhabitants take refuge in the citadel, churches and other holy places because they offer the best protection from the enemy. From these strategic points, the warriors defend the city against the invading army for months or even for years. During the siege the inhabitants cannot go out nor can any enter. The water supply is cut off and wells are dug to furnish water for a famine-stricken population. During the siege, conditions grow worse and hardships increase. The most serious situation is caused by the filth and refuse which accumulate in the streets and in the holy places where people have taken refuge. Eastern cities do not now have sewers. The refuse is taken out weekly and thrown into the fields for fertilizing. During war time, this refuse stands piled high on street corners, courtyards and around holy places, resulting in disease and plague.

Jesus had this in mind in his reference to "the sign of the abomination of desolation accumulating in the holy place". Jesus predicted the fall of Jerusalem was near. The historic city and its holy places were doomed. It was to be besieged and captured by Roman forces and the temple destroyed. Even the sacred shrines which the Jews so highly revered were to be defiled by themselves and later disgraced by an invading army. These predictions actually happened when the city fell before Titus in 70 A.D.

This also refers to false prophets and anti-Christ's whose teachings will defile and destroy the truth. Mark 13 : 14.



FALSE PROPHETS AND FALSE CHRISTS

For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.

Matt. 24 : 24.

Whenever true prophets acted as spokesmen for God, false prophets misrepresented God and spoke lies. At times, there was rivalry and competition between these two groups of prophets. Some of the false prophets were statesmen and politicians who always took the national side and predicted prosperity and victory. They gained strength and credence in the public eye because they played safe by predicting blessings to the people and calamities to enemies. During the reign of Ahab, false prophets had complete control over the land. The true prophets of God were ousted and were no longer consulted as in former days. Princes and kings, accustomed to rely on their good counsel and judgment, now punished the prophets by imprisonment or even expelled them from the country when they predicted defeats and issued warnings. This happened to Micaiah and Jeremiah (Kings 22 : 27; Jer. 38 : 6).

Jesus knew false prophets would come after him. He knew selfishness and greed would dominate and men would be willing to sell themselves for honors and easy living. He knew false prophets would preach a new religion in the name of Christ and would establish what he had condemned and abolished. He said, "By their works you shall know them". Jesus knew the work of the prophets who predicted prosperity and luxury, and encouraged the people to build temples and shrines and forget the suffering Christ would reveal they were not true prophets because a good tree could not bear bad fruit and a bad tree could not bear good fruit.

A true prophet is known by his fidelity to God and his courageous stand for the truth. Mark 13 : 22.



CARCASE AND EAGLES

For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together. Matt. 24 : 28.

When sheep stray, they are generally attacked by wolves and other wild beasts. While they prey on the bodies, eagles hover around waiting for their turn to come. Shepherds know where the lost sheep are by the eagles in the air and realize they have been killed.

Christ foretold the destruction of the Jewish state by Rome; Jerusalem was to fall and the temple which was the pride and center of the nation was to be demolished. When Rome was through with her task, other small nations around Judaea would take their turn and gather like eagles over the defeated nation and devour it. After the fall of Jerusalem, Jewish enemies would multiply and national calamity would be great. There is an Oriental proverb "When an ox is tied up and led down to slaughter, the knives to cut off his head are plentiful." The Jews were not only to be defeated by the Roman army who were like wolves, but they were to be humiliated at the hands of neighboring peoples who were like eagles waiting to descend upon the desolate city which was the carcase. This prophecy was fulfilled when Jerusalem was conquered by Titus, the Roman general, and the Jews were scattered throughout the world. Luke 17 : 37.



WORDS OF JESUS

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away. Matt. 24 : 35.

This is an Aramaic figure of speech. It means that what I say must come true. Easterners believe heaven and earth are everlasting and in conversation they use this phrase and others like it. For instance, "That mountain

may move away but I won't move," is figurative speech used to convey the positiveness of truth which is affirmed. The character of a prophet is staked upon the truth conveyed by his words.

Jesus was not only emphatic in his utterances but he was sure of everything he said because what he said was truth and truth is eternal as God is eternal. Heaven and earth may change their physical form but his truth remains abiding and unchangeable. His words were often questioned because in the eyes of the Jews he was not an authoritative teacher who would be accepted on the strength of his reputation. Jesus did not depend on superficial testimony but the inner truth of his message was expressed in the language of the common people. Mark 13 : 30, 31; Luke 21 : 32, 33.



WORKING IN PAIRS

Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Matt. 24 : 40, 41.

Easterners generally work in pairs. Two men take care of the sheep; one is the shepherd and the other is his assistant. The shepherd goes before the sheep and the assistant follows after them to see that none are lost or attacked by wolves. In the fields, two men plow or harvest; sometimes a father and one of his sons and sometimes a master and his servant. The father holds the plow handle and the younger man goes before to keep the oxen in position.

In the house, two women will sit on the floor grinding wheat; one is an elderly woman who uses both hands to turn the grinder and the other is a young girl who uses one hand to assist the older woman, and the other to pour the wheat into the grinder from a bag at her side. Blind women are always grinders. Two other women will

make bread; the younger woman rolls out the dough and the other places it inside the earthen oven to bake.

When a town is attacked and captured by enemies, all the young women and some young men are taken captive. The men of war are killed and the elderly women are left behind. Easterners respect women of old age and consider it a sin to kill them.

Jesus predicted the fall of Jerusalem; the holy city and the sacred shrines were to be defiled and destroyed, the people were to fall by the sword and young women and men were to be carried into slavery. The invading forces would also enter the privacy of the home. Even the young girl who sat grinding wheat in the inside chamber would be dragged out while the older woman would be disregarded and left to starve and die. Mark 13 : 16; Luke 17 : 31-35.



SERVANTS PUNISHED

*And shall cut him asunder and appoint him his portion
with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing
of teeth.* Matt. 24 : 51.

The Eastern text reads, "he will severely scourge them," that is, beat him severely, tear his clothes and inflict wounds on his body. When a man is punished severely it is often said "He is being cut to pieces."

The position of a servant in the east is similar to that of a slave. The master has complete power over him. When servants are disobedient, masters punish them severely and discharge them without pay. The work is divided among other servants until a faithful servant is procured. No doubt the Greek translator confused the meaning of word "palagoo" which means "flog" as well as "divide." No master may murder a servant because that would be a criminal offence against the state but even then the lord of a servant would not have to cut him in two to kill him.

"Appoint him his portion with the hypocrites," means his master may give him a small sum of money when he dismisses him as an unreliable servant.



WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom.

And five of them were wise, and five were foolish.

Matt. 25 : 1-2.

Most Oriental weddings take place in early autumn or in winter when people are finished with their work and have ample time to attend long ceremonial and marriage festivities. During these seasons the days are short and as the wedding feast starts in the evening and continues all night, people depend for light on candles and oil lamps. Butter is the fuel for lamps.

Oriental homes are badly lighted. The house has no windows except an air chimney on the roof. Easterners usually rise early and go to bed early and as there is no reading and writing to be done, there is little need for lamps during spring and summer and they are seldom used. The people depend for light on the sun's rays penetrating into the house through the little chimney on the roof. During autumn and winter, the days are short and some work must be done in the evening so the house is lighted by candles and lamps. In the evening, men and women enter and leave the house with lamps in their hands as the long, narrow and dark passages leading to the house can hardly be found without a lamp.

Candles and oil lamps are prepared before a wedding takes place. The parents of the bridegroom, neighbors, friends and strangers, provide abundant light for the wedding night. Light is the symbol of happiness and no wedding is properly conducted without plenty of light. An Oriental wedding continues uninterrupted, sometimes

seven days and seven nights, and during all this time the house is fully lighted. Men and women dancers hold lamps in their hands. Some men fasten candles at the head of their daggers. Visitors, coming from near-by, generally purchase oil at the town where the wedding is to take place. Some people, however, because of fear of not being able to obtain oil and candles, bring these supplies with them. As the bride is escorted during the evening when it is dark and because the hour of her coming is unknown, some visitors, to their disappointment, find the stores closed and the oil venders themselves waiting for the coming of the bride.

When preparations are completed, a party of men and women are sent to the home of the bride to accompany her to the wedding house. Easterners take time in doing things. While the bride is dressed, guests entertained, relatives and friends say farewell, the people wait patiently outside with their lamps for the procession. Before the bride and her party arrive at the wedding house, the bridegroom and his party go out a short distance with lamps to greet them just as Isaac went out in the field to meet Rebecca. (Genesis 25; 63-64.) Before the arrival at the wedding house, another elaborate procession of men and women is on its way to greet the bridegroom and the bride. When the entire party reaches the door of the wedding house, the bridegroom, his bride and the invited guests go in. The door is then locked because there is no room for all who seek to enter. Even invited guests who come late are left outside. They knock at the door but because of the noise of merry-makers, no one hears them. The servants are instructed not to open the door no matter who knocks and the bridegroom is too busy entertaining guests to be bothered with the men and women waiting outside.

Such is the case with the coming of the heavenly bridegroom. No one knows the time and the hour. Those who have made preparation in advance will have the opportunity to greet him and join him at the wedding house. The others who think they are his followers and admirers but have made no preparation or have waited for the

last day to prepare, will find to their disappointment the door is locked and it is too late to greet him.



SERVANTS APPOINTED GUARDIANS

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods.

And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey.

Matt. 25 : 14-15.

When an Eastern householder goes on a journey, he places his property and business affairs in the care of his servants. Some householders appoint one of the servants as overseer. Others apportion duties to each servant according to his ability and understanding. Every servant tries to do his best to please his lord on his return and, because of jealousy and rivalry, none of them would dare steal.

Servants are empowered to act as trustees of the household, to buy, sell, borrow, lend and look after their lord's family. Even though they may have grown sons, some Easterners would rather appoint servants to these tasks. This is because of polygamy. When a man has many wives, the house is filled with quarrels and troubles. Every wife would like to see her own son entrusted with responsible duties but it is not always easy for the father to make his selection. When David was dying, his favorite wife Bathsheba begged him to appoint her son Solomon as successor to the throne of Israel instead of Adonijah, the son of Haggith. (1 Kings 1 : 17). The majority of the people were with Adonijah but Bathsheba triumphed because of David's affection for her. This change caused the death of Adonijah and Joab, David's general.

So, in order to avoid jealousy and trouble between the children and wives strangers are often appointed as overseers. Servants who fail in their tasks are punished and

discharged and those who serve faithfully are promoted and given greater responsibilities and honors.

Accept your responsibilities and opportunities and make the most of them. Luke 19 : 13-24.



TO HIM WHO HATH SHALL BE GIVEN

For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. Matt. 25 : 29.

An Oriental landlord usually divides his land into lots and rents them to tenants. The landlord supplies the seed and in the oral agreement made, the owner of the land is to receive one-third of the crops produced and the seed he has loaned.

During the harvest season the land owner sends his servants to collect his share of wheat and seed, and to observe and report to him on the tenants' reliability and capability in order to decide if they are worthy of future contracts. Those who make the contracts are also empowered to make any changes which they deem wise and to recruit new tenants for idle lands. Every tenant reports the condition of his crops to the servants of the land owner. Some complain the soil is bad, others, that the soil is good but the irrigation system is bad. Some tenants have good lands but do not take good care of them and the crops are poor. Others have poor lands but they work hard and produce more wheat than the owner expects.

When the owner receives the reports, he immediately orders the servants to make changes. The land is taken away from negligent workers and given to good workers. In addition, the owner takes whatever wheat is raised for the seed which he has loaned. Thus the unfaithful worker is left without seed and without land and he sees the land and seed taken from him and given to a neighbor.

This saying was meant for those endowed with gifts which they do not use and for those who have small gifts but make great use of them. Every man has a place in life and a certain duty to perform. When he fails to discharge his duty, he loses his place in life to those who are more capable and faithful. Our duties are sacred because God's share is in them too. Just like the land owner, he expects his portion of the seed and when he does not receive it, he takes away everything and gives the seed and the land to another.



SHEEP SEPARATED FROM GOATS

And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Matt. 25 : 33.

Nearly all flocks in the East consist of sheep and goats. Every family keeps sheep and goats for both are needed. White sheep supply the wool for clothing and black sheep (goats) supply the hair for tents, bags and ropes. Both furnish the family with milk which is made into butter and cheese, the chief food. Rich families do not use goat milk but keep them only for the hair.

Sheep and goats graze together on the mountains and in the fields. Most shepherds hate the goats and sometimes punish them severely because they are wild and troublesome. They climb the steep places and go astray and the shepherds are kept busy watching them and fetching them back. The white sheep are gentle, walk slowly, graze quietly and slowly. When the shepherd calls, they hear his voice and obey.

When shepherds bring their flocks to the field, they stand in the midst of the road, back of the fold and separate the sheep from the goats. The sheep go to the right side of the shepherd on the roof of the fold to be fed with grass before they are taken into the field. The goats go directly through a narrow passage into the fold and no grass is provided for them. On the way to the

door of the fold, the goats see the sheep on the roof eating grass. This frets them and they grind their teeth and baa.

Jesus uses this practice of the separation of the sheep from the goats to illustrate the final separation of the righteous from the wicked. The righteous will enter into the garden of Paradise where everlasting comforts await them but the wicked will be sent into hell fire. The wicked will gnash their teeth and weep at the sight of the righteous entering eternal habitation while they are doomed to utter loss.



SIGN OF FRIENDSHIP

And he answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me.

Matt. 26 : 23.

In an Oriental family, two dishes and two spoons are considered sufficient for twelve guests, especially during a wedding or a festival when spoons, cups and dishes are scarce and articles have to be borrowed from the neighbors. Easterners have no idea of germs and do not know eating together might cause them harm. One often sees five or six men sitting on the floor, eating from one dish and taking turns in using the same spoon. Strangers are invited to eat from the family dish and use the family spoon, but beggars are excluded and eat alone using a separate dish and spoon.

During the meal men often take food from the dish of another group sitting near them. Sops of food wrapped in thin bread are exchanged without the slightest hesitation or embarrassment. Often a man eats half a sop and hands the rest to another. This may appear to an American as the worst breach of etiquette but, in the East, it is a token of love between two friends and one bestows great honor on another by eating from his dish. This is the greatest sign of friendship. When enmity exists be-

tween two men, they never eat at the same table. When they become reconciled, it is necessary to demonstrate their friendship by eating from the same dish.

Judas seems to have been sitting close to both dishes and on this particular occasion he dipped his hand in the dish put before Jesus and his group. He wanted to make Jesus feel he was still his best friend and he did this so that no suspicion might be aroused among the disciples, and Jesus himself, which would spoil his plans to deliver his Master to the priests and elders. Judas acted as though nothing were happening but Jesus knew. He realized Judas had been acting strangely and his seeming friendliness at the meal was to deceive them. Jesus, therefore, could no longer hold his peace and when the disciples insisted on knowing who would betray him, he said the one who dips with me in the dish is the guilty one. This announcement surprised and staggered the disciples for the act of Judas was a serious breach of Oriental trust. Mark 14 : 20.



THE CUP

And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; Matt. 26 : 27.

The use of a common cup in the east is not derived from custom or from an institution but is due to the scarcity of cups and plates. Today, in those parts of the east untouched by western civilization, it is usual for a family to use one cup. Even in the homes of the rich, two cups are seldom used. The cup used for water is also used for wine. Guests and members of the family drink in turn, passing the cup from one to the other. In Jerusalem and in Syria, people now have many cups and plates. They have special cups for wine and coffee and plates for different foods. This was unknown fifty years ago but modern industry has made pottery plentiful and cheap here as in most parts of the world.

Easterners know nothing of germs and do not hesitate to drink from the same cup and eat from the same plate. Those who believe the communion is holy and sacred and removes sin could hardly understand how the consecrated wine could be infected with germs.

Jesus and his disciples drank out of one cup because it was the only one the owner of the house could offer them. Had they been living in parts of the world where cups were plentiful, they would doubtless have used several cups.



THE COCK CROW

Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

Matt. 26 : 34.

Where clocks are not known, the shadow of the sun indicates the time by day and the stars by night. Cocks serve as alarm clocks to awaken laborers in the morning. Even though some homes have no chickens there are cocks in nearly every home. In the East chickens and cocks share the same room with the people. A board is fastened on one of the walls of the house where the rooster and chickens rest at night.

As soon as the light of dawn breaks through the chimney in the roof, the cock begins to crow. In a few minutes the silence of night is broken and the whole village resounds with the crowing of the roosters. The priests will then be seen going to church, the laborers follow them before going to the fields, and the caravans resume their journey. At times when priests fail to appear at church and laborers at their work, the cocks are blamed, just as Americans blame their clocks for being inaccurate.

The trial of Jesus before the high priests took place late at night, and it was over towards early dawn, just when the cocks began to crow. As there was no other way to indicate the time when Peter would deny him,

Jesus said it would be before the cock crows. Mark 14 : 30; Luke 22 : 34; John 13 : 38.



THE FATAL CUP

And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.
Matt. 26 : 39.

It is a long established Oriental custom when one wishes to do away with an enemy, to give him a banquet and poison the cup of wine which is offered him. Such banquets are elaborate and expensive and are intended to win the confidence of the honored guest who is to be the victim. After the meal, the wine is passed and the fatal cup is handed to the enemy by a confidential servant of the host under unsuspecting circumstances. When the wine is served every guest is expected to drink without asking any questions. If a guest becomes suspicious, he must either take a chance and drink or kill his host.

Jesus went to Jerusalem to attend the Passover banquet in honor of his heavenly Father. He was virtually the guest of the priests and Pharisees. He knew his cup would be poisoned because of their hostility and he knew the feast would be followed by his arrest, conviction and crucifixion. Jesus had no choice but to drink the cup or leave Jerusalem. This was a trying crisis so he sought the Father's guidance, willing to abide by the divine decision. Mark 14 : 36; Luke 22 : 42; John 18 : 11.



AWAKE AND PRAY

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. Matt. 26 : 41.

Judas' betrayal of Jesus opened the ranks of the disciples. Before the arrival in Jerusalem, some of his followers had already deserted. The twelve men who stood

by him were discouraged and also afraid. Judas, no doubt, was very active in creating dissatisfaction and rebellion among his comrades. He possibly warned them of the danger which would overtake them if their Lord was arrested and imprisoned and suggested they, themselves, might meet the same fate.

While they were in the garden, Jesus wanted them to keep awake and to pray so that they might overcome the temptation of fear. He did not ask them to "watch" meaning to offer resistance to the enemy, as the King James version implies, but to "keep awake," according to the Eastern text. He knew the Pharisees and priests were determined to seize him and he had no intention of resisting. While a revolt on the part of the disciples might save him from the cross, Jesus knew one of them might be tempted to assassinate him. This is a characteristic of eastern people. No matter how sincere a leader may be, should he meet defeat, he is slain by his followers. Ishbosheth was slain by his two officers (2 Samuel 4 : 7), and Darius was killed by his own men after the defeat at the battle of Arbela.

His disciples might have been tempted to put up a strong fight for him but Jesus wanted everything to take its course so that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. He wanted no other death but that on the Cross. Mark 14 : 38.



JESUS STAYS

*Rise, let us be going: behold, he is at hand that doth
betray me.* Matt. 26 : 46.

During the last moments in Gethsemane, Jesus was disturbed by the rustling of the trees and noises from the city. He had spent hours in prayer deciding his destiny; whether to die on the cross or to leave the place with the eleven men who remained loyal to him. During these hours, he had gone through agony to reach his final

decision. Jesus considered his mother and the sorrows which such a horrible death on the cross would bring to her. His body was making every protest to escape the cross but his spirit was yielding to the inner voice from heaven; "The spirit is ready but the body is weak." Jesus had to fight to eliminate physical weaknesses. While praying, he was interrupted by noises which caused him to fear but at the sound of Judas' footsteps, he rushed to his disciples and said "Rise, let us go. He who is to deliver me is coming." Temptation had been overcome and Jesus prayed again until the arrival of his betrayer and the soldiers.



JESUS' RELATIONSHIP TO GOD QUESTIONED

But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.
Matt. 26 : 63.

Galilee was close to the borders of Syria where paganism prevailed. The gods of pagan religions have sons and daughters conceived in a human way. Jesus' teaching was undoubtedly suspected and confused with pagan thought. The Pharisees and priests had watched him from the very beginning of his mission. Jesus was called the son of David and Jews would not tolerate a Galilean assuming such a noble title or calling himself the Son of God. To them, only the Messiah could be the descendant of David or the Son of God and the idea of bestowing these titles on Jesus, a Galilean, was ridiculous.

The high priest interpreted Jesus' teaching to mean he was the Son of God in a physical way and in the pagan sense. He would not have objected to a Jew calling God his father because the Jewish conception of the fatherhood of God was spiritual. Jews looked on God as the

father. David told Solomon to look upon God as his father. God called Cyrus, the Persian king, his son.

Jesus did not reply either affirmatively or negatively. If he had done so he would have said *aen*, yes, or *la*, no. He used neither word. He knew his teaching about the sonship was misunderstood so he answered "You say that," which means, you misinterpret my teaching relative to divine sonship. You think God has a wife but I have not said so. I call God, Father, because he is my father. The time will come when you will see the Son of man coming in the clouds of the sky and with glory.



SON OF MAN

Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Matt. 26 : 64.

B*ar-Nasha* is an Aramaic word derived from *bar* which means son, and *nasha*, man. *Bar-Nasha* means son of man. This term is also used to mean mankind, humanity, a man, human being, an ordinary man. When an Oriental declines honors and homage, he says, I do not deserve this honor, I am nothing, I am just a man, a plain working man. In the east, men of rank and nobility are addressed according to their social standing and rank and are given the title of *Mare*, my lord. Religious men are always honored and called Rabbi or father. A peasant is called a man.

The Jews expected Christ to come from the house of David. He was to assume a princely title and be known to the people from birth. Jesus, being a Galilean, could not easily make such royal claims nor could he connect himself with the priestly house. Instead of assuming an earthly title in harmony with Jewish Messianic aspirations, he called himself Son of Man which means a hu-

man being. He used this term more frequently than Son of God. It was an answer to those who vainly argued concerning his ancestry and nobility and furthermore showed he was no pretender to an earthly throne but he was to be the suffering servant and give his life for humanity. Luke 21 : 27; John 1 : 51.



JESUS DELIVERED TO PILATE

And when they had bound him, they led him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor. Matt. 27 : 2.

The Romans had granted the Jews full ecclesiastical jurisdiction but political power was reserved by the Roman governor who was the sole representative of Caesar. The Jews could condemn Jesus to death but they had no authority to crucify him. Jesus was accused on political grounds so as to secure a speedy trial, conviction and execution. The case had to come before the governor.

No doubt Pilate and Jesus conversed in Aramaic. All civil and military authorities learned the native tongue. They do today. French and English governors and generals speak the language of the country they rule. In case the authorities are unable to converse in the native language, an interpreter is brought in. Pilate had spent many years in the east and knew the language. Jesus could not have spoken any other language. There is nothing mentioned in the Gospels to indicate he knew any language but his native Galilean Aramaic. He spoke in his own defense. Little is known of the conversation between Jesus and Pilate which clearly proves no interpreter was present. The few recorded remarks were reported by the governor's servants or by Jews who were eavesdroppers. Mark 15 : 1, 2; Luke 23 : 1-3.



THE FIELD OF BLOOD

Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Matt. 27 : 8.

A field across the valley of Hinnom was purchased for the burial of strangers and was called *Hakel Dema*, meaning field of blood, because it was bought with the money for which Jesus was sold and which Judas turned over to the priests after he realized the terrible sin he had committed.

Every town has a separate burial place for strangers a distance away from the town. It is separate because strangers may be followers of other faiths and could not be buried in the regular cemetery. Travelers who die or are killed away from their homes are buried by the people of the town in the cemetery for strangers without any religious ceremony.



SCARLET ROBE

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.

And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. Matt. 27 : 27-28.

It is a common custom in the East for kings and princes to confer royal garments upon their brave and distinguished men. Degrees and other decorations are a very recent innovation. The robe is a symbol of authority and of distinguished honor. This practice is also followed by some hosts who show appreciation to their distinguished guests. When king Ahasuerus honored Mordecai, he commanded Haman to bring the royal apparel and place it on him. (Esther 6 : 8-11.)

Scarlet is the symbol of royalty and such garments were only worn by rulers and their families. When a new

ruler received his appointment from the emperor, he received an official garment.

Jesus was accused of making himself a king. Herod mocked him when he received him with the honors due a newly appointed ruler. The garment was probably one of his own discarded ones or it was a cheap imitation of one.



JESUS' DESTINY

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Some of them that stood there, when they heard that, said, This man calleth for Elias. Matt. 27 : 46, 47.

The Aramaic word *shbakthani* is derived from *shbak* which means to keep, reserve, leave, spare, forgive, allow, permit. *Dha shebket lnapsh shaba alpin gavr in aelin d'al borkahon la brakh ola sgido Lbala*, "I have reserved to myself seven thousand men who have not bowed down on their knees to Baal." (1 Kings 19 : 18; Romans 11 : 4) Keep, Joshua 8 : 35; reserve, leave, spare, 1 Sam. 14 : 36; forgive, Ps. 103 : 3, Matt. 6 : 12, Acts 5 : 31; allow, John 11 : 48; permit, Luke 18 : 16. (Eastern Text.)

The last letter of the word *shbakthani* indicates first person singular. *Eli, Eli, lmana shbakthani* reads "My God, my God, for this I was kept" or "spared", that is to say, it was my destiny to die this kind of death. It does not mean "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" as translated in the King James Version, nor is there anything in the tone of his cry to suggest an appeal for help. In his prayer in the garden Jesus had overcome all limitations of his body and left the outcome to his Father.

The Aramaic words for "forsaken me" are *taatani* derived from *taa*, to forsake or forget (Ps. 13 : 1, 42 : 9,

43 : 2, 44 : 9, 60 : 1, 78 : 7-11, 103 : 2, 119 : 140, 141 Eastern Text) and *nashatani* from *nasha*, to forsake or forget. Compare *Manashey*, *Manasseh* in Gen. 41 : 51, "And Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: For God, said he, hath made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house." Joseph was born in Assyria and spoke northern Aramaic.

Job also, through all his suffering, had faith in God and knew that his suffering was God's will. No eastern martyr has ever spoken of God's desertion in the hour of suffering.

If Jesus had meant he was forsaken by God, he would no doubt have used the word *taatani* or *nashatani* and the people near the cross would have understood. The Galileans who were present knew he actually meant his destiny was fulfilled. This is why none of the apostles have commented on his saying. Had Jesus meant forsaken, St. Paul at least would not have missed its significance. The soldiers and the Jews standing near the cross did not understand what he said because Jesus spoke Galilean Aramaic. If Jesus meant God had forsaken him, the Jews would have made an issue out of it and declared he was a condemned sinner. The Jews thought he was calling on Elijah because in Aramaic the word for Elijah is *Elia* and for God, it is *Eli*. They thought Jesus was appealing to Elijah for help. Furthermore the Jews could not have conceived Jesus would have said God had forsaken him because Easterners believe the manner of a man's death is predestined and when death comes nigh, they believe God is closer to them.

This is in accordance with the teaching of Jesus. For three years he had preached that God is a loving Father, aware of the fall of the sparrow. Jesus always felt God was with him. Even when he spoke of his death, he predicted his disciples would forsake him but his Father would stand by. "You will leave me alone; and yet I am not alone because the Father is with me." (John 16 : 32.) On the journey to Jerusalem he said that "the Son of Man was to be delivered to the high priests and crucified and rise on the third day." (Matt. 20 : 18.) Again, he said to

Pilate, "For this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." (John 18 : 37.)

How could Jesus have contradicted all his teaching and shattered the truth and hope of his Gospel followers? God was assuredly with him in this hour of agony. Even his enemies who watched him die exclaimed, "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now; if he will have him." (Matt. 27 : 43.) In the garden Jesus assured his disciples he could ask angels to come down and fight for him but his death on the cross was inevitable. He had to drink the cup because it was God's will.

These words are not a confession of defeat, despair or failure but of victory and triumph. His mission was fulfilled when he courageously defied the authorities of his day and went to the cross. He was not quoting from Psalm 22 : 1 which, according to the eastern text, reads "My God, my God, for what hast thou spared me. You have kept my salvation far away from me because of the folly of my words." The Psalmist here was discouraged and impatient and wondered, because he did not more quickly realize his purpose, why God had allowed him to live. This is how Easterners talk when they feel they have failed and they wish God would end their lives. See 1 Kings 19 : 4 where Elijah "sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die."

Lmana is used with different meanings such as, what a thing, for what purpose. It is not in the form of a question but it is an exclamation of wonder over the achievement when it is accomplished. Esther was induced by her uncle to petition the Persian king on behalf of the Jews stating she was made a queen for that purpose; that is to say, it was her destiny. It was unlawful for Esther to appear before the king uninvited. The punishment for such an attempt was death but Esther, regardless of the severity of the law of the Persian court, appeared before the king and besought him for mercy to save her people. Esther was not confident her request would be granted but she realized it was her mission. "If I perish, I perish." (Esther 4 : 14, 15, 16.) There is another Aramaic word *lhana*, for this, which resembles the

word *Imana*. Both are used in the same sense but *Imana* is exclamatory. Joseph told his brothers when he made himself known to them, not to grieve because they had sold him stating it was God's will and that it was his destiny to be sold and taken to Egypt. (Genesis 45 : 5.)

When Jesus was on the cross, the Jews reviled him and called him names because in their eyes he was dying as one who had blasphemed God. Instead of replying to the insults of the excited crowd, his exclamation was just like that of any Easterner today when he is dying an unjust death, "My God, my God, this was my destiny. I was born for this, I know I am innocent. Let the people think what they wish, but to me my death has a different meaning." These words were addressed to God his Father but they were intended to strengthen the shattered faith of his disciples and friends who stood bewildered, watching him die the death of a malefactor. He wanted to remind them once more this was his destiny, that the Messiah had to suffer at the hands of his enemies yet he had confidence in God.

It was this assurance which induced some of his disciples to have faith and remain in Jerusalem when their leader was convicted as a revolutionary and it was this assurance which sealed and fulfilled Old Testament prophecies of a suffering Messiah. These Scriptures could not have been fulfilled nor could he have risen from the dead if he had had the slightest doubt in God. It is interesting to know the Assyrian Church still teaches God was continuously with Jesus on the cross and in the grave because God could not be separated.

If God had forsaken Jesus then he was not divine and his mission would have been a failure. Pagan gods often forget their duties to their people and at times are asleep. (1 Kings 18 : 29.) Human fathers never forsake their children at the time of their death. Some of them travel hundreds of miles to be with their beloved at such a time. How could Jesus have thought God would forsake him and how could God have forsaken his beloved Son who was dying for the salvation of his children? His last words addressed to his loving Father were not, "Father

avenge them" or "Father, save me" but "Father, forgive them" and "O, my Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit." Throughout his suffering Jesus was conscious God was with him and that he was not deserted. He was not questioning God's wisdom like Elijah but surrendering to God in uttermost confidence and with the assurance of ultimate victory. Mark 15 : 3, 4.

"My God, my God, for this I was kept!"

This is my destiny for which I was born.

"My God, my God, for what purpose am I here!"

For this very purpose am I reserved.



THE RENDING OF THE TEMPLE VEIL

And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; Matt. 27 : 51.

Rending is symbolic of mourning and grief over the death of a great man. Easterners rend their garments when they hear of the death of heroes slain in war and of the death of distinguished men. David rent his clothing when he heard of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. 2 Samuel 1 : 11.

Matthew seems to have been overcome when recording the tragic death of his master. The catastrophe was so great, it affected all mankind and, as Matthew points out, nature shared in the grief and even the sacred veil of the Temple was torn in two. This was a sign of victory. To fulfill prophecy, Jesus was to unveil all religious and Temple mysteries; the Holy of Holies which was excluded by a veil and was visited by the High Priest only once a year was to be opened to the public.

Darkness is symbolic of sorrows which follow death. The day may have been coincidentally darkened by heavy clouds. Mark 15 : 38.



THE RESURRECTION

He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. Matt. 28 : 6.

The Aramaic word for "to rise" is *kam*, which means "to rise up from death," "to stand up," "to be successful." It is often said, "He has risen" meaning, "He has succeeded," "He has come through" or "He has awakened."

Even though Jesus had repeatedly tried to impress upon his disciples the Messiah had to suffer and die before he attained glory, and even though he explained he would leave them for a while and return, the disciples could not reason beyond the Jewish concept of resurrection. They could not believe Jesus could conquer death, that sinister enemy of mankind, or triumph over mysterious Sheol, the land over which even God exercised no jurisdiction. According to Jewish theology, this final triumph over evil forces would follow the coming of the Messiah and establish the Jewish state in supremacy on earth. The Jews, like other Semitic tribes, believed in immortality and the resurrection of the soul as the ultimate victory of spiritual forces over all evil, but the dead had to wait until the Kingdom of God was established and all evil overcome.

Jesus, according to the Jews and even his own disciples, had not fulfilled the Messianic promises. If he had not conquered the Gentile kingdoms, how could he conquer the realm of Hades? The disciples did not expect to see Jesus again after he was laid away in the tomb. The women went there merely because it was a custom. Most of the disciples had gone back to fishing and the others were fearfully hiding in bewilderment and seclusion. The tragic events of Jesus' arrest, trial and crucifixion had happened in such rapid succession, some of the disciples could not even believe their Lord had died. They were shocked, mystified and heartbroken at the sudden, apparent end of one whom they expected to live and reign forever and disappointed at the seeming frustration of their

dreams for a kingdom of heaven on earth. Jesus left them truly orphans. He had given them a few assurances which, for the time being, seemed vague promises but even these served as a consolation for the bereaved followers. They began to ponder over these assurances. Hitherto they had been thinking of their own selfish ends. The three years of continuous teaching that the kingdom would be a kingdom of the spirit, had left little impression on their minds. They coveted earthly gains because they had left their occupations to follow him. They expected to become rulers and judges of an earthly kingdom. Now these dreams vanished and their minds were free to contemplate the spiritual side concerning the kingdom. The "Suffering Servant of Isaiah" was the new picture they had of Jesus.

Jesus triumphed over physical forces and Death, the enemy of mankind, which can only destroy physical man. He rose with a spiritual body, the new Adam, free from all weaknesses and limitations which bind the body. His body was transfigured. Now he could pass through a closed door or move to another location without hindrance. Previously he was subject to hunger and thirst like ourselves but he never made such attempts. Now he has victoriously risen with a glorious body.

His disciples and followers who saw him after his resurrection had also risen to a new power. What, for a time, seemed a dismal failure, turned out to be a triumphant victory. The Master's death had aroused general sympathy and won many followers. A local event had taken on a national significance. By remaining loyal to him, their fondest dreams would come true. They would sit on his right hand and on his left in the new realm which would conquer all the kingdoms of earth.

They saw, as their Lord had seen, that life on earth was temporal. Life was preparation for the life hereafter and death had a new meaning. In Aramaic the word death *mota* means "not present, but somewhere." Death to the Jew was a calamity. To the disciples, it came to mean victory. The physical body of their Lord had died but

his divinity survived. Their Lord had given death a mortal blow and immortality a new meaning.

I believe this last enemy will ultimately be conquered through a new understanding of Jesus Christ and that the resurrection alone gives meaning, reason and comfort in this life.



BAPTISM

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:
Matt. 28 : 19.

The Aramaic word for baptism is *mamodita* derived from the Hebrew word *amad*, stand up. The Aramaic *amuda* means pillar. In the East the disciples and followers of a man are known as his pillars because they support him. It is often said, "he has been a pillar behind me," of one who stands for or backs up a person and pledges loyalty.

Baptism is a ceremony of initiation which distinguishes the followers, who take on themselves the pledge of loyalty to the new movement and stand as pillars behind the founder. Water is symbolic of cleanliness and of universal acceptance of the teaching and the ceremony is simple. Other societies inaugurated their movements by making marks upon the bodies of initiates, such as circumcision and the covenant of blood.

Baptism by water is an outward expression of inward cleanliness; it is further symbolical of baptism by the Holy Spirit when men surrender their bodies and souls to God and pledge to live a new life.

The baptism of John by water was a preparation for the baptism by the Holy Spirit. John was the herald of a movement to enlist every individual of every race and color, for the kingdom of heaven. Those who are baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity take the pledge to support the movement inaugurated by their Master, not only with money but also their lives.

The followers by immersion in water are dead to their former life and rise to a new life through Jesus Christ. Baptism by immersion, signifying death and burial, has been practised by Assyrian Christians from apostolic days. The priest dips the child in the water three times in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Until this ceremony is performed the child is considered unclean, but afterwards the child is admitted into the society of the followers of Jesus Christ. Matt. 3 : 13; Mark 1 : 9; John 3 : 22, 23.



MEASURES

*For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged:
and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to
you again.* Matt. 7 : 2.

As standard measures are still not to be found in many primitive countries, small and large weights and varied measuring yardsticks are still in use as of yore. Arms still continue to be used as the measuring yardstick for drygoods. Large and small stones and pieces of bricks are weights. Wheat is measured with a wooden box.

Measuring by arm is impractical and complicated for business because some men have long arms and others have short ones. It is not unusual to find a partnership of two merchants, one with long arms to buy and the other with short arms to sell. When customers see that the merchant has short arms, they complain and insist on having the articles measured with their own arms, or they bring a friend who has longer arms. The merchant objects strenuously to this and yields only when his customer refuses to buy. Greater difficulties, however, arise when borrowed articles are measured by arm. When they are returned, the person who had measured them may be away. This leads to long disputes and arguments between the parties concerned and the case is often settled by taking oaths. The lender, upon the return of borrowed things, insists on generous measurement, stating that he had

measured generously when the articles were borrowed. The borrower denies this because he claims the lender measured short when he loaned and he realizes the lender is now at his mercy. This is also true of weights and wheat measures. Some families have several sizes of the same size measure. When they buy, they use larger measures and when they sell, they use smaller ones. It often happens that a stranger will bring his articles of cheese and butter to the house of the customer and has to trust him for the weight or the measure or lose the sale.

Everyone is aware of light weights and crooked measuring practices. Therefore he counts upon rendering the same to his neighbors when they, in turn, come to borrow or buy from him. Thus with the measure they have measured, it is measured to them. In the end, no one gains. He who cheats is cheated and he who has given generously, to him is given generously.

Jesus was aware of these practices. He had seen people arguing and taking oaths and even going to court over measures and weights. At times, he himself was cheated. He had watched crooked wheat dealers not filling and shaking the measure, and the drygoods man measuring with short arms.



FORBIDDEN TERRITORY

These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: Matt. 10 : 5.

In Aramaic, there are two words for Samaria and Samaritan territory, *Shamrin*, meaning the city of Samaria and *Beth-Shamraye*, meaning the Samaritan territory. Both the name of the city, which was once the capital of the Northern Kingdom, and the name of the province are derived from *Shemer*, from which the city site was purchased by Omri, king of Israel, for two talents of silver. 1 Kings 16:24. The city was built on a hill a short distance from Shechem.

Today, just as in olden days, certain people in the East, because of their peculiar customs and religious differences, prefer to live by themselves in a restricted territory. Such areas are still to be found in Arabia, Iraq and Persia, and are restricted to members of particular religious sects. There is an ancient community of people near the city of Mosul known as devil worshippers. They have lived by themselves for centuries. Prior to the world war, they would not permit other people to pass through their territories or visit their sacred places. They trade with neighboring tribes but do not intermarry or have any social dealings with them.

Jesus was not allowed to travel in the Samaritan territory which laid between Galilee and Judea because of his teachings which were contrary to the established religion in that region. He often went out of his way and traveled long distances to come to Judea. At times he passed on the road near certain towns and sent his disciples to buy bread, as when he met the woman near the well. On such occasions, the traveler, when a member of another faith, is permitted to drink water and buy bread but not to lodge there. Such would be against the religious custom. They would consider themselves or anything the stranger might touch to be defiled.



WISE AND HARMLESS

*Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves:
be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.*

Matt. 10 : 16.

The serpent is generally considered to be the symbol of wisdom. The serpent is also the emblem of wickedness and treachery. This is because snakes assume the coloring of the native surroundings and they glide in the grass and under objects unnoticed. It was the serpent which deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden and caused them to sin. Gen. 3:1.

Generally the serpent will turn aside when it sees an

enemy approaching. The serpent does not invite trouble but when it is endangered, it will attack or will try to escape in order to protect itself.

The dove is the symbol of purity, gentleness, peace and sincerity. The dove is a very friendly bird and probably the first domesticated one. It is often said, "He is like a dove," which means, he is very sincere and pure in heart. Doves are harmless and they never attack other birds. Moreover, as a pet, the dove is faithful to its owner. When Noah sent it out of the ark, it returned with a branch in its mouth. Gen. 8:8.

Jesus instructed his disciples to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves. They were cautioned to be faithful to their work and avoid the ways of their enemies so as not to invite trouble and danger. He instructed them to be wise and careful in order to protect themselves by relying on God's power and wisdom. The disciples were to travel unarmed and in the event of danger, they were to flee from one city to another. In order to preach purity, peace and kindness, they must be peaceful, unarmed and harmless like doves.

Jesus well knew the Eastern people and the dangers confronting the apostles of a new gospel when traveling. His disciples had to travel among hostile tribes and confront enemies who would persecute them. They would meet men who would betray them. In the East, an unarmed and meek person meets less trouble on the road and is less liable to attack from thieves and bandits. This is because such men rely on God for protection and wear the armor of truth, gentleness and understanding. The enemy feels this power and knows that they are harmless.

In a world of hatred, one has to be gentle and harmless and depend on God's protection. But at the same time, he has to be wise for true wisdom, when rightly used, is a gift from God.



PIPING AND DANCING

But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling their fellows,

And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.

Matt. 11 : 16, 17.

In countries where playgrounds are unknown and fields are afar off, children play in the alleys, streets, market places and housetops. In ancient villages, an alley really is a long entrance connecting several houses which are under the same roof but separated by walls. This covered alley is generally used by children as a playground, especially during the rainy season.

"I piped to you" is an Eastern saying which means "I have done everything I can to inform you."

In Bible lands, nothing so excites children and young people as the sound of a flute, tambourine or a drum. At the sound of music, the children leave the houses to see what is happening. Music is rarely heard and when it is played, no one wants to miss it or fail to see the players and the dancers. Even the older people leave their food and still others go out with bread in their hands. Then again, when one wishes to assemble the people, drums, flutes and tambourines are played. One can hear on every hand, "I told you to come out." "What do you expect me to do, pipe to you?"

Jesus used this saying because the Jews did not come out to hear him. They had not harkened to the voice of John who called them to repentance. The prophets and men of God who preceded Jesus and heralded the new gospel did all they could to bring the people out to hear the good news, but the people were reluctant to give up their traditions to listen to the proclaiming of a new gospel. John was branded as a crazy man and Jesus as a friend of publicans and sinners. The people had refused to listen and had closed their ears to the voice of God.



MUSTARD SEED

Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Matt. 13 : 31.

The mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds known in Palestine. It grows wild and is considered to be a weed. I have never seen it planted. Easterners never eat mustard seed. They believe it causes insanity. However, at times the seeds are used for medical purposes. Where it grows, it becomes larger than any other plant but it is not a tree. The text really should read that it becomes like a large bush. The plant is about 2½ to 3 ft. in height, and small birds, especially wild sparrows, nest in it. Birds in the East make their nests in plants because trees are not abundant. During the very warm hours of the day, one can see birds resting under the mustard plant.

Jesus used this parable of the mustard seed because of the smallness of the seed. Mark 4:31, Luke 13:19.



SHALL NOT TASTE OF DEATH

Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom. Matt. 16 : 28.

"They shall not taste death" is an Eastern saying which means their spirit lives, to be rewarded in the heavenly kingdom. Jesus meant the spiritual death which is the death of the soul, the essence of life. "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." John 6:63.

Aramaic-speaking people often say, "He shall never die" because the person has achieved a purpose in his life and risen into the realm of the spirit. The sense of happiness and spiritual success destroys the fear of physical death. Spiritual success is life. Failure to achieve higher things in life is death.

The disciples of Jesus had left their homes and occupa-

tions. They had denied themselves the comforts of this world and its earthly possessions in order to achieve life everlasting. Their spirits would live forever because they had exchanged the smaller things for the greater and the material for the spiritual.

Both Moses and Elijah had overcome human limitations and had succeeded in achieving immortality. Even though they had departed this physical life, they lived securely in the hearts of their followers. This spirit of Christian martyrs and men of God has continued throughout the centuries to live and influence the lives of millions.



PRISONS AND PRISONERS

*Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me:
I was in prison, and ye came unto me.* Matt. 25 : 36.

B*eth-asirey*, prison, is a compound word. *Beth* means house. *Asirey*, derived from *asar*, is to tie or bind. Thus *beth-asirey* is really a prison where prisoners are bound in chains. It is not a place of detention where prisoners are fed regularly, pursue their vocations, enjoy games and study. Eastern prisons do not have shower baths, hospitals and libraries. Such a place in the East would be luxurious for even the rich who have never seen a shower bath, library or hospital. There is no comparison between the prisons of the East and the West. It is therefore very difficult to convey the meaning of the prison and its tortures as described in the New Testament.

In many Eastern countries, prisoners are bound, hand and foot, in chains. Notorious criminals are treated very harshly. Their feet are put in stocks. The prison is the dirtiest place in the city, with no sanitary facilities. The dirt is allowed to accumulate. The prisoners are only fed with bread and water which only prolongs their lives and their sufferings. Their goodly garments are taken from them by the unpaid caretakers, and their remaining clothes are never washed during the time they are in prison. Prisoners are scourged once or twice a day.

Kind prison officials allow relatives and friends to visit the prisoners and to bring them food and clothing. Usually this is only done after a bribe has been given to the caretaker. In such cases, the prisoner is at least relieved of his hunger. Prisoners who are serving long terms and whose homes are at a great distance, suffer inconceivable privation and misery. They have no visitors and no money to buy food. They die a gradual death from hunger, cold, thirst, and the unsanitary conditions.

Because of the deplorable conditions found in prisons, Easterners believe nothing brings greater reward than helping the prisoner who is a stranger by giving him food and clothing and by visiting and comforting him when he is sick.



HOLDING HIS FEET

And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Matt. 28 : 9.

When a ruler or high church dignitary is greeted, men bow down almost to the ground. When they are seated, men and women throw themselves at their feet and grab the hem of their garments. Some of the popular greetings are "I throw myself at your feet," "I am less than the dirt under your feet." These mean, "I am at your mercy." They are also tokens of affection.

To hold the feet of a nobleman or a holy man is symbolical of humbleness and submission on the part of the supplicant and a high homage to the person thus greeted.

The women were told that their Lord had risen from the dead but they had not as yet seen him. When they saw him, they greeted him with the affection due one they had so much loved and followed as their Lord and Saviour. As kissing is not a custom in the East, they greeted him with deepest affection and worshipped him as one who has conquered death and come back to them.



ST. MARK

John Mark was a Jew, son of Mary and devout follower of Jesus. After the Crucifixion the apostles and the early converts met at her house. (Acts 12 : 12.) The tradition is that Mark was the young man who fled naked, leaving his robe behind when Jesus was arrested at Gethsemane (Mark 14-51).

Jesus had many followers in Jerusalem, most of whom were Galilean merchants. It is probable that Mark, even though young, had seen and heard Jesus on his visits to Jerusalem. His mother Mary must have been one of the first converts in the historic city. Some say Mark was the disciple who was with Peter when he followed Jesus to the court yard of the high priest, and that he was acquainted with the high priest. (John 18 : 15, 16).

He accompanied Paul and Barnabas from Jerusalem on their first missionary journey. (Acts 12-25). Later he left them, at Pamphylia. On the second journey Paul refused to take Mark with them because he had left them, but Barnabas was determined to take him. This resulted in a dispute and separation between Barnabas and Paul. Barnabas took Mark with him and went to Cyprus, while Paul chose Silas and went through Syria and Cilicia. Mark spent some time in Cyprus and later he was with Peter in Babylon in the Persian Empire, where Peter had been preaching to the Jews and others of Semitic race. Many other apostles have gone to the East seeking the lost sheep of Israel, especially those who were taken into captivity. Peter calls Mark, "my son," in his first epistle where we read "The chosen church at Babylon and my son Mark salute you." (1 Peter 5 : 13). It is interesting to note that the patriarch of the church in the East whose See was at Seleucia, Persia, assumed the title Shimon Peter (Simon Peter), and this title has been carried to the present day.

The gospel of Mark greatly resembles that of Matthew. This is because Mark was in possession of most of the scrolls which contained the early preaching of Matthew. The church at Jerusalem and Antioch could hardly have sent out missionaries who were new converts, without written material concerning the teaching of Jesus, especially in the case of Paul, Mark, Luke and Barnabas, who were new converts, and knew nothing about this new teaching. This is also true of the missionaries who followed them. They always took their gospels whenever they went to preach about their Lord, and this is still done by American and European missionaries.

Mark omits the genealogy of Jesus which was probably not yet written. Such material is always written later when the author becomes prominent. Mark stressed the miracles, messiahship and works of Jesus more than the other gospels. It seems probable that Mark copied from scrolls which were written by Matthew when he was at Jerusalem, adding to it what he himself knew and what he had learned from Peter. If the tradition is correct, Mark is the man who was known to the high priest. (John 18-16). He was also an educated man, and had been in the rabbinic schools which were under the care of the High Priest. This is probably one reason why Barnabas and Peter took him with them. Mark could help them in writing letters to the established churches.

Later legends placed Mark at Alexandria, and a seventh century legend associates him with Italy, where all the other apostles, according to European tradition, were buried. But these legends are hardly credible, because with the exception of Paul, there is no mention in the gospels that any of the other apostles ever went to Italy. Mark probably died in Persia or returned to Antioch, the home base of the mission. On the other hand, Eastern Christians claim and believe that all the apostles with the exception of Paul, died and were buried in the East.

When and where Mark wrote his gospel it is hard to say. Internal and external evidence on the subject is inadequate and obscure. But if Mark was not the actual writer or compiler of his gospel, he certainly was the

author of the sources of documentary material and its preaching. The tradition ascribes to him the authorship of the second gospel. Irenaeus states, that Mark wrote his gospel after Matthew was written, and after the death of Peter. Origin says that it was written before the gospel of Luke and John (Eusebius, *His. Eccl.* 6, 25, 5). The differences and style in composition between the gospel of Mark and that of Matthew were chiefly due to the understanding and progress of the gospel message in different places. The apostles and the disciples had few written and many oral sources, and as the Movement was new, passing through unsurmountable difficulties, it was not possible for them to meet and decide on what was to be accepted and rejected among the writings. Their time was largely taken up with more important issues such as the defence of Christianity before the Jewish high priests and Roman officials and controversial questions about circumcision and the like.

THE VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Mark 1 : 3.

The wilderness is a barren and silent region without habitation. As it is a level country and because there is nothing to distract, the voice carries further and is clearer in the wilderness than it is among the hills and mountains which reflect echoes.

John's voice was like that of a shepherd warning the sheep in the wilderness. He brought a strong and persuasive message to the Jewish people without theological dogmas to confuse them. His denunciations of the scribes and Pharisees were direct and emphatic and everybody could understand him. His plain demand was for righteousness and justice by way of repentance. It is not surprising that though his career was short, his voice carried far and is still heard today.

PREPARATION

Public works and sanitary departments, common in the western world, are unknown in the eastern lands where ancient civilization still dominates. New bridges and roads are seldom built and those constructed in former days are not repaired. King's highways and other thoroughfares are obstructed at the entrance to cities with piles of refuse to be sold to farmers.

Cities are cleaned and roads repaired only when the official visit of a king or prince is expected. In addition, the entrance to the city and the streets through which the royal visitor is to pass are decorated with tapestry rugs and artistic ornaments. There is often rivalry among the people in the effort to outdo one another with decora-

tions so as to receive greater honors from royalty. Great care is also taken by the local officials to make sure the royal carriage enters the city without accident or delay. The rise and fall of many officials depend on attention to this duty.

This was a call by John to the Jewish Church to clean house. By ridding the church of the false dogmas and traditions of the elders, which were the piles of refuse, the way for the new laws of the kingdom of heaven for the Jews as well as for all nations of the world would be prepared.



THE OPEN COUNTRY

John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. Mark 1 : 4.

The word "wilderness" does not always mean an arid desert where no vegetation and water are found. At times regions with abundant water and vegetation are called *khorba*, that is, uninhabited land. When a town is abandoned or destroyed, it is called *kharaba* which means desolate. Wilderness in this case means an uninhabited region used for pastoral purposes. John did not baptize in the arid desert but at the river Jordan where water was abundant. We also read about Jesus leaving the cities and going into the wilderness for a retreat. This, also, was uninhabited land. Sheep-raising people usually live all the year round at such places.

Madbra in Aramaic means an arid desert without inhabitants or vegetation. Such places are found between Palestine and the Red Sea peninsula. The desert is sandy and without water. Most parts of the Arabian desert, however, are inhabited by nomad tribes who live in tents. Abundant sheep and animals are raised by them although the country is called a desert.

The Aramaic word *bara*, wilderness, literally means an

open country. The word barbarian is derived from this root. *Bar*, son, and *bari*, of the open country, means a son of the open country. Matt. 3 : 1; Luke 15 : 4.



THE KINGDOM OF GOD

And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.

Mark 1 : 15.

Whenever persecution, injustice and suffering exist, Orientals dream of better governments and good laws. When the arm of man fails to bring justice, the people look to God as the only ruler and to his heavenly kingdom as the only realm where justice, happiness and prosperity prevail. To an Easterner, God is a house of refuge during times of trouble and a shelter in persecution and war. They, more than any other people, place their hope in God and pray and patiently wait for the coming of his kingdom.

As Palestine was the connecting link between Assyria and Egypt, it was exposed to attacks from the enemy. Assyrians, Babylonians and Egyptians made it a battle ground in the wars against each other and the natives were the victims of the belligerents. During these conflicts, large military forces were transported and the land of Palestine was devastated. Cattle and sheep were confiscated by the retreating forces and heavy tribute was levied by the victorious armies.

After the fall of Assyria and Egypt, the native Jews continued to be mistreated and misruled. They suffered persecutions and onslaughts during the Greek rule in Palestine. Then, after the Roman invasion and the annexation of Judaea to the Roman empire, the people were burdened with three forms of taxation, one to Caesar, one to the Jewish state and a third to the temple. During David's rule they paid only one tax as, in those ancient

days, God was the sole ruler. After the fall of the Davidic kingdom and the subjection to foreign yoke, they began to dream of the kingdom of heaven which alone could bring them peace and happiness. This was to be the Messianic kingdom on earth. Pagans would be overthrown and Jews restored to power and prosperity. In turn, this Messianic kingdom would become the kingdom of God where spiritual and moral character would prevail regardless of racial differences. Matt. 6 : 33; Luke 18 : 24, 25.



FISHERS OF MEN

And Jesus said unto them, Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men. Mark 1 : 17.

The Aramaic word *sayade* primarily means hunters but it is also used of fishermen. Easterners do not usually indulge in games but those who do are nicknamed hunters or fishermen. "Will make you fishers of men" means you will catch and convert men by speech. The enemies of Jesus tried to catch him by the word which, in Aramaic, means to trap by hunting. They hunted up words and then asked him certain questions which they thought he could not answer. In the east many conversions are the result of debates. Mark 12 : 13.

Jesus meant the disciples were to be so trained and versed in the scripture they could silence even the high priests and would catch men by their words and convert them to the new teaching. Instead of catching fish and hunting animals, they would travel everywhere recruiting people for the kingdom of Christ. This was a notable position for obscure fishermen. They were soon to stand before high priests, governors and kings, testifying for their Lord and proving he was the Messiah Christ. Luke 5 : 10.



THE EVENING HOUR

And at even, when the sun did set, they brought unto him all that were diseased, and them that were possessed with devils. Mark 1 : 32.

During the hot summer months, the heat in Palestine is intense. Little labor is done; sheep are in the hill country, grazing; farmers are waiting for harvest. Most people spend the day at home in order to avoid the heat but in the evening, they gather on the house tops or sit under trees discussing town affairs or debating religious subjects. Meetings, conferences and social affairs always take place in the evening during the summer.

The sick also remain in the house until the sun begins to sink behind the hills and the cooling shadows fall. Then, those who are ill with fever rise to perform some of their daily duties or to go to healers. Those seriously sick are brought out and laid on a quilt to rest beneath the shadows of trees or near a wall. Easterners believe the sun is bad for sick people.

So, in the evening, everybody is out. It was at this time Jesus preached to the people and healed the sick brought to him from Capernaum and neighboring towns.



CASTING OUT DEVILS

And he healed many that were sick of divers diseases, and cast out many devils; and suffered not the devils to speak, because they knew him. Mark 1 : 34.

The Aramaic word for devil is *deva*. *Devana* is an adjective meaning insane. Another Aramaic word, similarly used, is *shedana* which means demented and refers to those whose talk is distorted and whose minds are unbalanced. It is also applied to those who have a hot temper. At times men thoughtlessly call each other *shedana* or *devana*. Even though these terms sound strange and refer to demons and devils, they are really the names of

diseases known to the ancients. When translated into modern languages, the original meaning is lost just as English, Latin and Greek medical and scientific terms lose their meaning when rendered into Aramaic. For instance, to an Oriental, the word radio might mean witchcraft, electricity might be magic, and names of medicines might appear as the names of gods.

Insane asylums and sanitariums are unknown in the East. Those who are unbalanced or insane live with their own people. They marry, work, go to church and at times are apparently normal but they are known as crazy by the town people who sometimes make fun of them. There are times when the insane become violent and tear their clothes and walk through the town naked, swearing and cursing, frightening women and children, breaking doors and causing injuries to the public. Even then most lunatics remain free to do as they please due to the respect and sympathy which the town people have for the relatives. Nevertheless when violence is beyond control, they are bound in chains by their own people.

Strangely enough, some lunatics are regular churchgoers. They attend meetings and listen to the preachers, not so much to pray and listen to the lesson as to imitate the preacher. After the meeting, they gather curiosity seekers in the street and lecture them, imitating the priest or rabbi. Others are taken by their people to churches and shrines, or brought before holy men to be restored. When healed, they change suddenly and become very gentle and meek. They would give everything they had, even their lives, to the shrine and healer. Once restored, they become deeply religious and go about telling other people how they were healed, praising the man who healed them. Some of them exaggerate and at times embarrass the healer. A man who had been crazy for only two years might unintentionally exaggerate and say he had been crazy for ten years and one who had been cured only of insanity might claim he had also been lame. Such exaggerations reflect on the healers. This was how Jesus felt. He resented publicity and fame and wanted nothing for his work of healing. These insane men and

women whom Jesus healed were his acquaintances. They had known him for years. Some of them had worked with him in the fields. Others knew his father and mother. They were astonished to know Jesus possessed such divine, healing powers. When they were healed, thinking to please Jesus, they began to spread his fame and to bring other cases to him. Jesus warned them not to publish his healing powers because that would take his time away from preaching. He did not address the invisible evil spirits because the spirits could not have declared his healing powers to people. Matt. 4 : 24; Luke 8 : 3, 6.



TOUCHING A LEPER

And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.
Mark 1 : 41.

Leprosy is a contagious and malignant disease. When it breaks out in a community, every person is warned to be cautious. As soon as a leper is pronounced unclean, even the members of his family refrain from touching him. The fear of this terrible disease makes a leper helpless and an outcast. In case he happens to be rich or in high position he remains in his own home but his food and clothes are kept separate.

In Biblical days it was unlawful to touch a leper until he was cleansed and announced clean by the priest. (Lev. 12 and 14). Jesus was not afraid of this frightful disease. He knew that his healing power was stronger than this destructive disease which often came from uncleanness. By touching the leper Jesus proved that he was not afraid of it. This act removed fear from the mind of the leper. Healers and holy men are regarded as immune from disease, but ordinary people are afraid of the contagion by touch. Some people seek a blessing from a healer to guard against the possible attack of leprosy. Jesus did not have to touch the leper to heal him. He

did it so as to remove the fear which had a grip on him. He often healed people by a word. Luke 5 : 13; Matt 8 : 2.



UNCOVERING THE ROOF

And they come unto him, bringing one sick of the palsy, which was borne of four.

And when they could not come nigh unto him for the press, they uncovered the roof where he was: and when they had broken it up, they let down the bed wherein the sick of the palsy lay.

Mark 2 : 3, 4.

Those who live in modern western cities and are accustomed to tall buildings and skyscrapers, could hardly understand and picture an Oriental house. How could men take a sick man on a house top and break up the roof to lower him from the ceiling? Those who had lived in the Orient know this is quite practicable.

Most houses in the old towns of Syria and Palestine are still built in the same style as in the times of Abraham and Jacob. Dwellings are constructed of rough stones, unbaked bricks and mud. They are built in the shape of a square box without windows but with an air chimney in the center of the flat roof. Some houses are not more than ten to twelve feet in height and have only one story. Two story houses are very rare. The back walls of houses built on a hilly slope are not more than two or three feet high, so that it is easy to get on the roof without a ladder. Houses are built close together and the roofs are so evenly arranged they serve as playgrounds for boys and girls and meeting places for men and women. In some instances, when a town is built on a hill or mountain slope, the roof of one house serves as a court-yard for the adjoining house. Roofs are made of beams and branches of trees. A layer of straw is thrown over the branch and the straw is covered with earth. The roofs are so poorly constructed that when it rains, the roofs leak. On some house tops one can see large holes wide open. Strangers could easily watch what goes on in

the house below by looking through these holes or the chimney. A business or social conversation is often carried on between people in the house and those on the roof. The making of a hole in the ceiling is an easy task. It takes only a few minutes to remove the branches. This recalls an Oriental proverb: "When the master of the house and the thieves work together, they can steal an ox through the ceiling."

On this occasion the house was crowded and it was difficult for the men to carry the paralytic into the house. Others who had brought their sick to Jesus, were ahead of them. These men, however, did not lose hope. Since they could not enter by the door, they would do so by the roof. So these four men carried their sick friend in his quilt bed up to the roof. They peeped through the chimney or a hole to find out where Jesus was seated. Then they opened a space in the roof between the beams and lowered the sick man on his quilt bed. The house was so crowded and the noise so great, the owner of the house was not aware of what was taking place on the roof until all were surprised to see a quilt bed containing a sick man hanging from the ceiling and slowly coming down where Jesus was seated. The act was very ingenious and the faith and perseverance of the men so great that Jesus was moved. He sympathetically responded by healing the man.



RECLINING AT MEALS

And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house, many publicans and sinners sat also together with Jesus and his disciples: for there were many, and they followed him.
Mark 2 : 15.

The Aramaic word *smikhey*, reclining, means also guests. In eastern countries some guests sit upright on the floor with legs folded under them; others, more honored, recline against bedding, clothes, rugs or other objects used as cushions. Tables and chairs are unknown.

As soon as a guest enters a house, the women rush to bring a carpet or a quilt to put under him as a token of hearty welcome. According to eastern etiquette, any man visiting another is his guest and food is set before him whatever the time of day and no matter if he has previously eaten. This custom has been modified in recent years in Palestine, Turkey and Persia. Coffee or tea is served instead of food. Matt. 9 : 10.



PUBLICANS AND SINNERS

And when the scribes and Pharisees saw him eat with publicans and sinners, they said unto his disciples, How is it that he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners?

Mark 2 : 16.

Publicans are the tax collectors of the east. The functions of publicans are quite different from those of custom officers in America and Europe. They are not necessarily employees of the government nor is their task solely confined to collecting custom duties. They are collectors of taxes and revenues as the agents of one who has purchased this privilege from the government.

Governments usually levy taxes and tribute on salt, animals, land, and on certain export and import articles. The collection of taxes is generally assigned to the highest bidders who are usually district leaders and powerful men. These contractors, in order to fulfill their obligations and make a good profit, recruit shrewd and cruel men as collectors of taxes. These are the necessary qualifications of the publicans. These men survey the crops, count the sheep and levy taxes as they please. The whole question of taxes is left entirely to their discretion. The central government has nothing to say. It is satisfied to have the contract fulfilled and the amount of money pledged by contractors paid into the treasury. Government officials are indifferent to the methods employed to collect taxes. Thus the public, especially the poor, are at the mercy of dishonest publicans who extort

bribes and collect unjust and undue taxes which they share with government officials. Taxes are generally extracted by force and violence. When the poor fail to pay the sums assessed or protest the confiscation of their crops or sheep by the tax collectors, they are stripped of their clothes, cruelly beaten and made examples in order to make collections of taxes easier. Homes are searched by publicans for money and goods and women and children are panic-stricken. This is why publicans are hated and known as sinners. No man of high standing accepts the post of publican. The injustice done by them is never forgiven in this world and the people believe God will never forgive them in the world to come. Men of reputation and piety are reluctant even to touch or speak to a publican on the street. He is an outcast and everyone shuns his association. His bread is known as the bread of blood and many people will not eat it because the publican is considered unclean. Moreover, publicans are always the target of priests and religious reformers who denounce and brand them as traitors.

The publicans were friendly to Jesus because he attacked the priests and Pharisees and had more respect for publicans and sinners than for men who wore religious garbs and imposed taxes on the people in the name of God and religion. Matt. 11 : 19; Luke 5 : 30.



ABIATHAR

And he said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungered, he, and they that were with him?

How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shew-bread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?

Mark 2 : 25, 26.

The high priest at the time mentioned was Ahimelech, the son of Ahitub. Abiathar was his son who ministered with his father and brothers.

When David fled before Saul he stopped at Nob, the city of the priests. He and the men who were with him were hungry and there was no bread, so Ahimelech supplied them with the shewbread which was taken from the table before the Lord. This was sacred bread which was only eaten by priests, but the emergency induced the priests to yield to David's demand. The law was broken when David and his men ate the sacred bread. This generous act towards David caused Saul to destroy the city of Nob and to kill the priests and their families. (1 Sam. 21:4). Abiathar escaped with David and when David became the sole ruler over Israel he was made high priest. Later he was deposed by Solomon because of his part in the intrigue of Adonijah. 1 Kings 2 : 35.



TRUE AND FALSE HEALERS

*And the scribes which came down from Jerusalem said,
He hath Beelzebub, and by the prince of the devils casteth
he out devils.* Mark 3 : 22.

There are true and false healers in the Orient and their power is recognized in two ways. It is either derived from God or from the devil. This is based upon the ancient belief in dualism which holds there is one god of good and another god of evil. It is also believed all men are influenced by angels and by demons. This might not be quite true because some of the influences which we regard as coming from evil influences might be traced to ignorance and superstition. In ancient days, people even offered their children as burnt sacrifices on the altars to idols but neither God nor evil forces were responsible for such human offerings.

A man, under the power of God, is able to prophesy, work miracles and heal the sick. When he is under the power of the devil, other gifts are bestowed but they are used for evil purposes such as sorcery, curses and black magic common in Eastern lands. It is at times difficult to distinguish between the men who possess these

powers because both work miracles and wonders. Those who work evil, claim they are under the power of God and their help is sought by the public. Compare the works of Moses and those of Egyptian magicians, and the struggle for supremacy between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. (Exod. 7:11; 1 Kings, 18:21). The charge against Jesus that he had an unclean spirit, classed him with the witch of Endor. (I Sam. 28 : 7). It was not true but it was advanced to discredit his mission and his miraculous powers. It was an attack by the enemies of Jesus but he emphatically denied he derived his powers from Satan. Jesus said one devil could not cast out another without self-destruction or a kingdom could not stand if divided. Matt. 9 : 24.



THE MEASURE

And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. Mark 4 : 24.

A wheat measure is a square wooden box about two feet wide and fourteen inches deep. Most wheat growers in the east have one or two wheat measures, varying in size. This creates mistrust on the part of the buyers. Some shrewd buyers therefore prefer to select their own measures before they buy wheat.

When the price of the wheat is determined, the owner kneels down and places the wooden measure between his knees, while wheat is poured into it until it is filled. Before the price is determined, it has to be agreed on whether the measure will be shaken up or not. Good and generous men always shake it and let the wheat flow over it, but some wheat sellers resent having the buyer touch the measure or shake it.

When wheat is borrowed, the borrower selects the same measure and uses the same methods of measuring when he returns it to the owner. If the measure was shaken down, he will do the same.

In the east cheating by measure is very common. At times people buy with one measure and sell with the other. Even in shops dry goods merchants, who still use the arm as a standard measuring rod, generally cheat the customer. One would not be surprised to see two partners in a shop, one with long arms and the other with short. The man with long arms buys products made at homes and the man with short arms does the selling.

Weights and balances are also very unreliable. Every family thus has its own weights, which consist of one or two pieces of stone, or two or three bricks. These pieces are apt to break off at the edges because children often play with them.

Jesus had seen so much cheating and dishonesty in business that this warning against deception was quite appropriate. Matt. 7 : 2; Luke 6 : 38.



LAKE OF GALILEE

And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. Mark 4 : 37.

The lake of Galilee, even though small in size, is often visited by storms. This is because the lake is situated in a valley, six hundred feet below sea level. The winds blow from the north towards the Dead Sea in the south, and disturb the water. Such storms are considered dangerous because Easterners are poor sailors and are easily scared when overtaken by a tempest.

Storm and sickness are rebuked by holy men who also bless and curse, bring or stop rain. On such occasions words from the scriptures are invoked. The wind is commanded to be calm. In the case of disease passages are read from the scriptures, telling of God's sovereignty over evil. The diseases are rebuked and commanded to leave the sick. Luke 8 : 23.



MY NAME IS LEGION

And he asked him, What is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.

Mark 5 : 9.

He casts out demons" is an Aramaic colloquialism. It means he restored an insane man. The Aramaic word for demon is *sheda*. It is often applied to men who have queer ideas and who talk too much or to anyone whose actions are not approved. The term *shedana* is very commonly used. Mothers often call their little children *shedana*. They do not mean they are devils or possessed with devils but that they have been naughty. Brothers and sisters call each other *shedana* without intending any offense. Religious people and elders use the term frequently in conversation without the slightest idea of the devil. When a man becomes violently insane he is spoken of as having turned into a devil or satan. Jesus called Peter Satan but this was a rebuke and did not mean that he had become a devil.

While Jesus was traveling and preaching, the insane were brought to him. Some of these men were not severely afflicted with insanity but simply could not think straight. Others had a wrong outlook on life. Some hated their neighbors and relatives and others were hard to get along with as they were temperamental. Jesus quietly talked with them and corrected wrong notions. He made them reason clearly and differently so that their false ideas disappeared and they were healed.

Once, when he was confronted by a lunatic, Jesus asked "What is your name?" This man replied "My name is Legion because I have many demons in me." He did not mean he had many devils in him. One devil would have been sufficient to take care of him if that were the case. The lunatic meant he had many wrong ideas and was hopelessly insane. He had completely lost his mind and had no hope of restoration. Jesus helped even such difficult cases and restored them to sanity.



CARPENTER

Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.

Mark 6 : 3.

Before the introduction of Western civilization in Palestine, Syria and Asia Minor, carpentry was an insignificant occupation and still is in many countries. Even though the art of the blacksmith and silversmith is very old and for unknown centuries has been handed down from father to son, carpentry, until recent days, was not considered an art. In many parts of the East where tables, chairs and other wooden objects are unknown, carpenters are not found. The little demand for this trade is supplied by amateur workers. In other places one may find a certain man known as a carpenter and whose advice is sought in wood construction. This kind of carpenter has generally a few crude tools made by hand, consisting of a saw, hammer and plane. The whole outfit is stored in a little bag which, at times, the family use for a pillow when short of bedding.

The carpenter's task is to fix broken doors, ploughs and make wooden spoons, but there is little demand for these things because nearly every family make their own. Some of them seek the services of a man who is more familiar with the trade and who has assumed the title of carpenter because he owns the tools which are scarce and valuable. A carpenter in some of the ancient lands of the East has nothing to sell; nor is he permanently engaged in this occupation. Most of them are farmers, sheep raisers and merchants. Carpenter work is done in the evening or when an article breaks, and needs immediate attention.

Joseph was not a carpenter in the sense understood by American people. Like any other Easterner he had his sheep and cattle. His services as a carpenter were sought by neighbors to fix doors, make wooden keys and help in the construction of houses. In the East, such services

are rendered gratis and at times the carpenter is given a good meal, a few eggs and cheese. When a man builds a house, his neighbors help him, because they expect him to help them when they build their own houses.

Some writers unfamiliar with Oriental customs picture Joseph and Jesus as master carpenters, working in a shop, making ploughs and yokes, and other articles for sale. Such articles are never sold in the East. Yokes and ploughs are cut from the trees and made in the field by the farmers themselves. Some ploughs are made from the tree and need hardly any work to be done on them. There is no reason to believe that Jesus worked as a carpenter. Nothing in the Gospel leads to this conclusion. Jesus did not use references to saws and hammers in his teachings and parables. He did use references to all forms of pastoral pursuits. Matt. 13 : 55.



A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR

But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.

Mark 6 : 4.

This is characteristic of the Assyrian people who were the ancestors of the Galileans. Assyrians are noted for jealousy and envy towards each other. An Assyrian dislikes to see a fellow countryman attain prominence. He welcomes and listens with respect to the prophets and leaders of other countries but he despises his own. When an Assyrian rises to notoriety or wealth, his own people try to pull him down but when a man is poor, everybody pities him. English missionaries who have worked for many years among the Assyrians notice this weakness and call it a disease. This jealousy has, no doubt, been one of the causes of the decline of a once powerful nation.

If Jesus had been in America or Europe, he would not have said these words. Americans and Europeans are proud of their statesmen and great leaders in science and religion and do all in their power to advance them. This

is also true of Jews who not only help each other but are proud to see a Jew become a great leader.

Jesus was raised in Galilee and the Galileans had Assyrian customs (2 Kings, 17 : 34). Hatred and jealousy were dominant then as they are today among the remnant of Assyrians. The people of Nazareth would not object to a religious leader from another town but they would not tolerate greatness in a Nazarene. Strange enough, his brothers were jealous of Jesus and doubted and denounced him. Matt. 13 : 57; John 4 : 44.



A STAFF

And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse; Mark 6 : 8.

In this case, Mark is more accurate than Matthew (Matt. 10 : 10). A man can travel in the East without money or bag or other necessities because he relies upon hospitality, but he must have a staff to protect himself from bandits and dogs which often snarl at and bite a stranger. A staff is also protection against wild animals and serpents. Every traveler carries a staff even if he has other weapons. "A staff is a friend on the road" is an Oriental proverb. Sometimes the use of a staff is a mere habit as the carrying of a small staff when walking on the roofs in the town.



SODOM AND GOMORRHA

And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city. Mark 6 : 11.

In Hebrew *Sadam* means a place of lime. Sodom and Gomorrha were two prosperous ancient cities, near the Dead Sea, which flourished in biblical days. They were

destroyed by the rain of brimstone. This destruction was probably caused by an eruption. In the East such catastrophes are always interpreted as a punishment for the wickedness of the people. These cities were on the route between Egypt and Assyria, and became very rich because of their commercial advantages. One of the theories concerning their destruction and fall is that of the abandonment of the route.

Jesus mentioned the destruction of these cities as a warning of impending disasters which were to befall Capernaum, Bethsaida and other cities around the Lake of Galilee. Sodom and Gomorrha had no prophets to warn them. If they had messengers of God, they would probably have repented like the people of Nineveh. The Jews were constantly guided and warned by the prophets of God whom they persecuted and murdered. The destruction of their cities was therefore to be more serious than that of Sodom and Gomorrha. Capernaum and Bethsaida were destroyed in the early centuries and are still in ruins. A portion of the walls of the synagogue at Capernaum, where Jesus preached, still remains and are visited by tourists. Matt. 10 : 14; Luke 10 : 12.



HEROD ANTIPAS

And king Herod heard of him; (for his name was spread abroad:) and he said, That John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do shew forth themselves in him.

Mark 6 : 14.

Herod Antipas was a son of Herod the Great. After his father's death he was appointed to a portion of the kingdom which comprised the territory of Galilee and Peraea with the title of Tetrarch. He married Herodias, wife of his brother Philip, tetrarch of the regions of Iturea and Trachonitis. He executed John the Baptist because John did not approve of the marriage. Even though Herod was an Idumaeon by race, he was a Jew by faith, and was subject to the Biblical law of Moses, which pro-

hibits a man to marry his brother's wife except when his brother had left no heir. Philip had children by Herodias.

It is this Herod whom Jesus called fox which, in Aramaic, means shrewd. Pilate sent Jesus to him because he had jurisdiction over Galilee and Jesus was a Galilean. Luke 13 : 32.



JEWISH CEREMONIALS

And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brasen vessels, and of tables.

Mark 7 : 4.

The meaning of this verse, according to the Eastern text, is "what is brought from the market is to be washed."

In the East fanaticism has always exerted a strong influence over the people. Not only are religious men of different faiths not permitted to sit at the same table and eat together but they are also defiled if they touch each other. Fruits and vegetables bought at the market places are washed before they are eaten only because they may have been touched by members of other sects who are declared unclean. Foodstuffs, such as meat and cheese, are declared taboo by religious men unless such articles are purchased from merchants who are members of the same faith. The prohibition is declared in the name of God and his holy angels. Those who break this law not only become defiled but also fall under a curse. For example, a Jew may not buy meat from a Gentile butcher; a Mohammedan or Christian would be defiled if he ate Jewish bread; an Armenian would not eat Jewish cheese.

This is an ancient form of Oriental boycott only it is done more effectively and carried to extremes. It is worse than the boycotts of today because it is done in the name of God and religion by men of one faith against another. It has existed for unknown ages and its evil effects are

so deeply rooted and strangely felt that at times it arouses the people of one religion against another.

The Pharisees and the elders instituted most traditions and made themselves appear righteous before the eyes of the people by their mere external observance. They forgot the weightier laws but they were always careful about traditions. They washed their hands and feet before eating and they also washed the articles brought from the market but they oppressed the poor, took bribes, and embezzled the property of widows and orphans.

Pharisees, elders, priests, all were amazed because Jesus and his disciples failed to purify themselves in the traditional way before eating and, in addition, ate with publicans and sinners. They thought if Jesus was a man of God he would have some respect for the traditions of the elders. In the eyes of Jesus these external observances were foolish and wrong because they often needlessly produced bitterness and hatred between the Gentiles and the Jews. According to his teaching, only that which goes out of a man can defile him. Matt. 15 : 2.

BEDS AND DEATH BED

Beds and bed clothes are a few quilts and hand woven rugs. Beds, similar to those used in America and Europe, are unknown in many eastern countries. The people sleep on a quilt or rug spread on the floor.

When a man dies, his body is declared unclean and the bed clothes on which he has slept are unclean. They are not to be used again until they are washed. All other articles used by the dead man must also be cleansed and sanctified.



CORBAN

But ye say, If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is Corban, that is to say, a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; he shall be free. Mark 7 : 11.

Corban is an Aramaic word and typically Oriental. It is expressive of deep affection and reverence. This term implies the person addressed is clean, sincere and pious, and that he is worthy as a sacrifice to God. To say *corbani*, "You are my sacrifice" or *corbanec*, "I am your sacrifice" are marks of the highest devotion.

Corban is more frequently used between fathers and sons to show profound loyalty, implying they are ready to die for one another if necessary but it is often a conventional phrase and means nothing. Jesus condemned such vain and worthless compliments because they were used deceptively to avoid actual duties. He also condemned the flattery practised by the Pharisees. They were satisfied to have a son use this term although the name might not be supported by filial gratitude and concern for the welfare of father and mother.

In this passage, however, the word corban has yet a different meaning. To pledge to God the income remaining after expenses were met was corban but often only made as an excuse not to support father or mother. Jewish religious teachers were satisfied with such evasive statements and the gifts which they received but Jesus denounced this and pointed out how much more important it was to honor and support parents. Matt 15 : 5.



A SYRIAN WOMAN

The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation; and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. Mark 7 : 26.

The Eastern text reads "But the woman was a heathen, from Phoenicia in Syria." Matthew calls her a Canaanite woman from the borders of Tyre and Sidon.

The disciples urged Jesus to grant her request to get rid of her. At first he refused because she was a heathen. His reply was "I am not sent except to the sheep which went astray from the house of Israel". (Matt. 15 : 24). According to Mark's Gospel, the woman came into the house where Jesus was, but Matthew states she met them on the road. One reason why Jesus refused to have anything to do with this woman was because of his loyalty to the Jewish faith. He knew the prejudice of his people against Syrian foreigners and they would be scandalized if he, a Jewish prophet, treated pagans with the same consideration he showed his own people. He wanted first to minister to the people of his own faith and then to the Gentiles. This was why he selected his disciples from members of the Jewish faith and why he did most of his work among them.



DOGS DESPISED

But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs.

And she answered and said unto him, Yes, Lord: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs.

Mark 7 : 27, 28.

Dogs are liked and well treated in Europe and America but Easterners regard them as unclean animals. Some men think they are defiled if touched by a dog. The Mo-

hammedan, accidentally touched by a dog after his prayer, is defiled and must say his prayers over. Dogs are often cruelly punished and seldom fed. They roam the streets searching for food. They eat the meat from animals unlawful for men to eat or the carcase of any animal.

Easterners do not use tables. Food is served on a tray or piece of cloth and when the tray is lifted, small pieces of bread fall. Dogs patiently watch people eating, waiting for the remaining crumbs after the tray is lifted. These crumbs are also given to beggars. Easterners feel it is a sin to throw bread to dogs because bread is sacred and dogs an abomination and because bread is rather scarce. No one would like to see children hungry and his dogs well fed.

In the east, members of one faith consider men of another faith as dogs because they have different beliefs which permit them to eat meat of animals unlawful for others to eat. Mohammedans look upon Christians as unclean and call them dogs.

Jews looked upon their pagan neighbors, Syrians, Greeks and Idumeans, as dogs because they ate the swine meat which was an abomination to them. They called them dogs simply because dogs ate all kinds of meat without discrimination. Jesus used the expressions of the day for easier understanding. Matt 15 : 26-27.



EPHPHATHA

And looking up to heaven, he sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, Be opened. Mark 7 : 34.

The Eastern version reads *ethpathakh*, which means to be opened. The Greek translator or the copyist made this error accidentally. The pronunciation and spelling of the word prove the error could easily be made especially if the translator or copyist were a for-

eigner unfamiliar with Aramaic. The same word is used to-day in common Aramaic speech meaning to open. *Ephphatha* as given in the Western versions is neither Hebrew, Aramaic nor Greek and has no meaning.



OUTSIDE THE VILLAGE

And he cometh to Bethsaida; and they bring a blind man unto him, and besought him to touch him.

And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought.

Mark 8 : 22, 23.

Villages are walled in. Jesus took this man outside the village to avoid the curiosity seekers. On such occasions Easterners generally mob the healer. The crowd is made up of admirers and enemies. All gather around him. Some want to see the miracle while others make fun and shout insults. The healer's mind is confused.

Jesus had to do this act quietly. He had to ask the man questions. This could not have been done in the village. Perhaps it would have been difficult and even embarrassing for Jesus to spit on the eyes of the blind man in the midst of a crowd. In the East, spitting is an insult. Only holy men could spit on a wound. The Pharisees would have resented Jesus' act because he was not accepted as a prophet. Spitting on a wound is practiced as a rebuke to diseases and the evil which caused them. It is a repudiation of the power of evil. Jesus followed these practices because they were common among the people and some of the sufferers would not believe unless the outward form was used. To-day in Kurdistan and neighboring countries, recognized healers spit on the face or other diseased part of the body as a means of cure. They would not hesitate to do this even to a nobleman. Mark 7 : 33.



WIND OF SICKNESS

And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. Mark 9 : 17, 18.

In the olden days when causes of sickness and mental diseases were unknown, people believed they were due to the attacks of evil spirits. To say "The spirit seized him" meant a sudden convulsion. The Aramaic word *rokha*, spirit, also means rheumatism and wind. When a disease becomes epidemic it is often said, "there is a wind of sickness", or, when a person has a series of diseases, "he has been attacked by a wind of sickness".

When the boy was brought to Jesus, he suddenly fell to the ground in a fit of epilepsy. Jesus asked the boy's father if he believed in him. He replied, "Yes, my lord, help my weak faith." This is an Oriental expression of modesty and gratitude and does not imply unbelief. In response to this genuine faith, the son was healed. Matt. 9 : 32, 33; Luke 11 : 14.



THE SPIRIT OF DUMBNESS AND DEAFNESS

When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. Mark 9 : 25.

The dumb and deaf spirit refers to the disease which had caused the deafness and dumbness. The word *rokha* here means the wind of sickness. It is often said "He has been attacked by a wind." When wheat is diseased, it is said the wheat is attacked by *rokha*, meaning a prolonged wind has dried it. Easterners often say

"There is a wind of infirmity going around." "Do not enter into him again" means do not attack him.



FASTING AND PRAYER

And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting. Mark 9 : 29.

Easterners generally overeat during feasts and weddings and suffer the consequences in illness. Fasting is recommended because it gives the body a rest. Prayer brings peace to the disturbed mind, the soul is stimulated and spiritual desires are quickened. Through prayer one is further brought into communion with the divine power. Fasting and prayer are always followed by Easterners as a means for the restoration of their bodies and the forgiveness of their sins. Healers also fast in order to receive the power of God for the work of healing the sick.



SALTED SACRIFICES

For every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Mark 9 : 49.

Food is always salted before it is cooked. This seasons the food and makes it tasty. When an animal is killed for food, the meat is immediately salted because there are no refrigerators or other devices to preserve meat. Flies and intense heat cause rapid decomposition. Any kind of food is salted before cooking but no salt is used when the meal is eaten. Women generally know how much salt to use and some women are praised for salting the family food precisely right. This custom has evolved from the scarcity of salt.

When animals were sacrificed, the meat was salted before it was offered so as to have a good savor. Most

shrines are located at a distance from the town and on high places. The animal is taken there alive. The salt is carried by the man who has made his vow. The animal is then slain, its flesh salted and cooked on the stone altar of the shrine. Country folk gather from the neighborhood to partake of the sacrifice.



SALT IS PRECIOUS

Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another. Mark 9 : 50.

Salt is a sacred token of friendship. When Easterners eat salt together, they pledge their lives for each other. When kings and princes enter a city, they are greeted with an offering of salt as a token of welcome and sincerity.

Salt is also a precious article and in some regions very scarce. From ancient times to the present day salt has been a medium of exchange in some eastern countries. It seems very probable salt was the first medium of exchange before gold, silver and copper were discovered and before man employed scientific methods for manufacturing salt.

In eastern regions, far from seas and oceans, salt is not only precious and scarce but also sacred. Small deposits of it have been discovered in mountains but because of crude mining methods, a sufficient quantity could not be secured for human and animal consumption. Salt, therefore, becomes a valuable possession. Taxes are paid in salt. Buying and selling, in some parts of the east, are still conducted through the medium of salt. Salt, moreover, is necessary not only to preserve food but also to preserve life. It is said human life cannot be sustained for any length of time without the use of this precious article. Matt. 5 : 13; Luke 14 : 34.



THE CROSSING PLACE

And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, he taught them again. Mark 10 : 1.

The Aramaic word *evra* is derived from *abar*, to cross. *Evra* means the crossing place where the caravan crosses the river. Here animals are unloaded of their burdens and the people rest and refresh themselves. Friends and enemies meet. It is a place where a man can make many acquaintances with natives as well as foreigners.

This was a vantage point where Jesus could meet many people. It was a central place where the water was shallow and well known to all travelers. Caravan routes extended from Egypt to Babylon. John the Baptist also sought such places because he could deliver his message to a large and diverse company of people. A small remnant of his followers known as "the people of St. John" are still found in Bagdad and in southern Mesopotamia. No doubt the news of John's baptisms were carried thither by converts. Matt. 8 : 18; Matt. 19 : 1, 2.



LEAVING RELATIVES

And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's,

But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life. Mark 10 : 29, 30.

Orientalers have no regular working hours. Laborers work from sunrise to sunset. Shepherds and servants while performing their duties, have no time to see their

wives and children. Shepherds work day and night, eating and resting at intervals. They leave their homes and children while they care for the flocks. Servants are required to be on duty all the time. They must also be ready for service throughout the night. They are practically slaves. They eat and live in the master's house and visit their own homes at rare intervals and only with the permission of the master. Their time and attention are taken with their lord's house, his wife, his children and his household affairs. Their own families receive second attention.

When a young man desires to learn a trade, he leaves his home and family and eats, sleeps and lives at his master's house. He often becomes more attached to his master's house than to his own. He does everything to please his lord and teacher so as to win his favor and learn the secrets of his trade. Servants and apprentices who live in their own homes, find little favor in the eyes of masters. The master can not entrust everything to them. He looks on the apprentices as strangers who may some day become his competitors. He keeps from them the most important secrets of his trade. The faithful and loyal servants and apprentices live at the home of their master, often marry his daughters and inherit his business and other property.

The followers and disciples of Jesus were not told literally to forsake wives and children. He meant they were to be closely attached to him and deeply concerned in the work of his kingdom before all other interests. They were to forget their wives and children and material interests for a time in order to win the confidence of their Lord and learn the secrets of his teaching. Their own families were to take second place and later the disciples would be rewarded one hundred fold for faithfulness. Instead of loving only their own fathers, mothers, wives and children, they would be trained to love the whole world. Instead of being loved by their own people only, the whole world would love them. After they had attained a spiritual understanding, all material possessions would be at their disposal. This meant princes and kings would

bow down to them and offer abundant gifts in their names.

THE REWARDS OF JESUS

The words "with persecutions" are mistranslated from the Aramaic, *rdopia*, derived from *rdap* which means, to follow, to pursue, to persecute. In the Psalms, according to the Eastern version, we read *tebotakh wrakhmek radponi*, which means, your mercy and favors followed me (Psalm 23 : 6). Jesus is here promising his followers more than they leave behind. In the East, when warriors or laborers are recruited they are promised more than they were then receiving. If a man had ten sheep and he was asked to go to war, his lord would promise him twenty or more sheep. If he left behind twenty bushels of wheat in the field, he would receive double that amount.

The words, mothers and maidservants, are written almost alike in Aramaic but pronounced differently, *aemhatha*, mothers, *amhatha*, maidservants. This is not so where the words are in the singular, *emma*, mother, *amta*, maidservant. The writer omits the reference to fathers and replaces mothers with maidservants because a man cannot be rewarded with other fathers and mothers when he loses his own nor is it probable for a man to have two fathers and two mothers. He can however be rewarded with brothers and sisters, maidservants and children, fields and other worldly goods.



CURSING THE FIG TREE

And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry:

And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet.

And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it.

Mark 11 : 12-14.

In many Eastern lands, fruit trees growing on the roadside, or in a field near the road, belong to travelers, and the poor. Some of these trees grow naturally; others are planted by unknown people and are therefore considered public property. This ancient custom still prevails in Kurdistan. It often happens that a field belongs to one man and the trees to another. If a man should plant a tree on another man's field, and the tree grows and bears fruit, both tree and fruit belong to the man who planted the tree and not to the owner of the field. In other words, the tree is the property of the one who planted it, and when the identity of the real owner is lost, it becomes public property.

As no food can be obtained along the road, hungry travelers constantly watch the roadside for fruit trees. They not only eat from the tree which is beside or at a distance from the road, but also fill their bags with the fruit to take home. Thus such trees soon lose their fruit. In many instances, the fruit is picked before it is ripe. A traveler might pass only once on a particular road. He therefore feels that he should take his share while he can get it. When the season arrives, these trees have leaves but without fruit on them. The leaves and fruit of a fig tree appear and fall at the same time. While the leaves are coming out the tiny figs also appear, and when they fall the fig season is over.

While Jesus was on his way from Bethany to Jerusalem, he was hungry. Easterners never eat an early meal. They leave the house fasting. He saw a fig tree a distance

from the road and thought he might gather a few figs from it. He went to the tree as a man seeking food to satisfy his hunger, and not as a God Creator of the trees and giver of the fruit. He did not use divine power to find out whether the tree had fruit on it or not, because he was living and thinking as a man. On his arrival at the tree he was disappointed to find plenty of leaves but no fruit. It was the season for fruit but there were none on the tree. Other travelers on the road before Jesus had no doubt picked all the fruit. Disappointment and hunger drew a casual remark or curse from Jesus, "You shall never bear fruit hereafter."

The cursing of the fig tree has been hard to understand. Many preachers and Bible students wonder why Jesus cursed the tree. Some say it was the fruit season, but the tree had not given its fruit. These people fail to see that a tree by the roadside suffers at the hands of hungry travelers. If Jesus had gone to this tree looking for food, many others had done the same and probably with better success.

Others say the tree was late in bearing its fruit. This could hardly have been the case for all trees are under the same natural laws, and Jesus would surely not have gone looking for figs out of the due season.

Cursing is an Oriental custom and it is often thoughtlessly done. Nearly always when an Easterner looks for something and fails to get it, he expresses his disappointment. If a man were searching for water, and found a brook which had dried during the summer months, he would say, "Remain dry, no water shall spring out of you hereafter."

It is however true that Orientals still believe in the efficiency of a curse pronounced by a holy man, just as they believe in the good effect of blessings uttered by them. Vineyards and flocks are still cursed or blessed by holy men. In this case it is not the casual cursing of the fig tree which is important but the lesson we learn from it. Those who do not contribute to fellowship have no place in the world. Matt. 21 : 19, 20.



THE UPPER SEATS

And he said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces,

And the chief seats in the synagogues, and the uppermost rooms at feasts: Mark 12 : 38, 39.

The Eastern version reads "the front seats in the synagogues, and the head places at banquets." This practice is in accord with Eastern customs. Banquets are held in the large room of a house. The reference here is to the prominent seats and not to rooms. According to Eastern etiquette, honorable guests, as priests, politicians and rich men, are given the chief places at a banquet. Here the food is more plentiful and the distance from the door is greater. Guests are arranged according to social standing. The least important guests, such as beggars and musicians, sit near the entrance to the room. If, perchance, a distinguished guest enters late, a servant or the master of the house immediately notifies one of the other guests to take a lower place by saying to him "Get up and go down, an honorable guest is coming." It often happens that a distinguished guest, arriving late, will take a lower seat, but he is promptly ushered to a higher place as a token of honor.

It was to avoid this unseemly embarrassment and confusion that Jesus instructed his disciples to take the lower seats at banquets. Matt. 23 : 6; Luke 14 : 7.



WHAT TO SPEAK

But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost.

Mark 13 : 11.

Until recently, lawyers were unknown in Eastern lands and are still unknown in parts of Turkey, Irak and Persia. In these places disputes and quarrels are settled in the old way by arbitration or force. The rich and the noble are urged to make peace and the poor are forced by the authorities to settle their differences or pay heavy fines.

When a person is charged with a serious offense, as murder, treason or highway robbery, he has to appear in person before the authorities and defend himself. The whole process of trial is conducted orally and in most instances the parties concerned, including the judge, are illiterate. No records are ever kept and no precedents are quoted. Everything depends on the words of the defendant and the honesty of the judge. The presence of the officials and the weight of the charge bewilder and terrify the persons involved especially if they have never been before authorities. In such cases they are generally coached by experienced men who are familiar with the unwritten law and understand the demeanor of the officials. They are taught how to answer certain questions and avoid others or, in answering, to place the blame for the crime on some one else. The authorities are aware of these professional instructors and their system of bribery and, if discovered, they are more severe with the accused.

Jesus knew his disciples would be accused of false teachings and treason against the government and he knew they would be approached by instructors with the thought of getting money from them. He did not want his followers to rely on such advisors for help but to trust in the power of the Holy Spirit. He explained, it would be easier on them to tell the truth than to rely on un-

scrupulous instructors with the possibility of becoming confused and finally convicted of false testimony. Moreover, if they were not guilty they would not require instruction and need not be afraid. Matt. 10 : 19, 20; Luke 12 : 11.



BROTHER BETRAYING BROTHER

Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death.

Mark 13 : 12.

When an Easterner becomes a convert to a rival faith, he also renounces his family. The sacred family ties are broken. His parents and brothers and sisters disclaim him because he has brought disgrace on the family and the race by his conversion. They are ready to avenge his renunciation by murdering him. His father or his brothers would like to be the first one to lay hands on him and will willingly kill the apostate son or brother for changing his religion.

It often happens Assyrian and Armenian girls marry Mohammedans against their parents' will. To do this they must renounce their faith and, in such cases, if found, they are murdered by relatives. Mohammedans do likewise to those who renounce this faith and become Christians.

Jesus knew the teachings of Christianity would cause dissension and friction among the members of families; some would cling to the old faith, others would be converted to the new religion. Jesus told his followers, the faithful converts would be persecuted for the acceptance of him as their Lord and murdered by their relatives. This has continued throughout the centuries.



THE HOUSETOPS

And let him that is on the house top not go down into the house, neither enter therein, to take any thing out of his house:

And let him that is in the field not turn back again for to take up his garment. Mark 13 : 15, 16.

Housetops in the East are flat and serve as playgrounds for children during the day and as meeting places for men and women. During the summer months people sleep on the housetops to escape the heat and fleas. Members of the family work, eat and sleep on the roof because the house is not only warm but uncomfortable. Animals are kept in the house for protection from robbers, making it utterly impossible to destroy the ravaging fleas which cause sleepless nights and inflict tortures on the people, especially helpless children. When people sleep on the roofs, clothing, valuables and other possessions are kept in the house, the doors are locked and the key placed under the pillow. Some men take only working clothes on the roof, others, only their under garments.

In the summer, farmers sleep in the fields especially during the threshing season when the wheat has to be protected from robbers. The workers sleep in the straw. Their good clothes and other belongings are kept between the sheaves. Some workers spend weeks and months at the threshing place. Food is brought to them by wives or daughters twice a day. The fields and threshing floors are usually about a mile from town. As there are no laws to protect property, each farmer must watch his crops from the time they ripen until the fruit and wheat are stored in the barn.

When a town is suddenly attacked from all directions by an unexpected enemy, those sleeping on the roofs flee in confusion for protection. They have no time to go down, open the door and get their garments. This would expose them to attack by the enemies lying in wait to kill the people and plunder the homes. The workers in the fields are cut off from their homes. They dare not

return because the enemy is already in possession of the town. Eastern robbers attack towns to plunder the valuables. They are not concerned with the fields except if a town is to be occupied permanently and then the wheat and other food supplies on the farm are seized.

The fall of Jerusalem was prophesied to be very sudden. With tranquillity and peace reigning, people living in luxury, buying and selling, marrying and giving in marriage, men and women sleeping on comfortable housetops with no thought of fear, the catastrophe would come like a sudden cloud covering blue sky and bringing an unexpected storm. The Jews would have no time to settle their differences with Rome and avoid impending disaster. The fall of the city would be so sudden those who were asleep on housetops would not have time to go down for clothing but would flee naked. Those who were in the fields would not dare return home but must flee for their lives, seeking refuge in the mountains. Every family would be separated and scattered without hope of reunion. Matt. 24 : 17, 18; Luke 17 : 21.



THIS GENERATION

Verily I say unto you, that this generation shall not pass, till all these things be done. Mark 13 : 30.

The reference here is to the continuation of the Jewish Race which is to survive and witness these predictions, as a testimony of the truth of what Jesus said. The ten tribes were lost in Assyria, but the generation or tribe of Judah was to survive regardless of the changes in dynasties and governments which were to come and go in the Near East and Palestine. Jesus did not refer to generation as a period of time but the continuation of a race, for in those days, races were easily assimilated, exterminated and obliterated, such as Haitis, Amorites and others which were exterminated by the Jews.



SIMON THE LEPER

And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat, there came a woman having an alabaster box of ointment of spikenard very precious; and she brake the box, and poured it on his head. Mark 14 : 3.

In the East, people are often given nicknames to distinguish them from each other. This is partly due to the limited number of names. Some nicknames are suggested by physical defects of the persons so named. The word describing the defect is used in the form of an adjective either before or after the name, as blind Jacob, Simon the leper. If a man's eyes are weak or one of his eyes blind, he is called blind although he may be suffering only from defective eyesight. This custom of distinguishing people by diseases they had contracted or defects of their bodies is still followed.

Simon was called the leper because he had previously been afflicted with leprosy, of which he was healed. If he really had had leprosy at that time, he could not have entertained Jesus because Jewish law did not allow lepers to remain in society. Simon was called the leper to distinguish him from others of the same name. This was his nickname, given him because of the unfortunate disease he once had. Matt. 26 : 6.



JUDAS ISCARIOT

And Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve, went unto the chief priests, to betray him unto them. Mark 14 : 10.

Semites use very few names. Sometimes one will find in a family several called by the same name. In a village probably about one-third of the names are either Simon, Abraham or Judas. These names are popular. When speaking of people in the same town, one is distinguished by mentioning his father's name, namely, Simon Bar-Joni. When speaking of the people with the

same name but of different towns, the name of the town is used instead of the father's name so as to distinguish others of the same name, such as Judas of Iscariot; Mary of Magdala.



A MAN CARRYING WATER

And he sendeth forth two of his disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. Mark 14 : 13.

Carrying water, cooking and all household tasks are a woman's work in eastern countries. It would be a disgrace for the men of a family to be seen doing these things. In a household where there is no woman the water is supplied by women of other houses.

Large towns and cities generally maintain a lodging house for strangers, foreigners and members of other faiths who, because of differences in their beliefs and customs, could not be entertained. Also, families are often reluctant to open their homes to single men because men and women, guests and strangers all sleep in the same room.

Khans and lodging houses where only male guests are allowed, employ a male servant to carry water. It is against the custom of the east to hire a woman for this task as no woman could enter the presence of so many male strangers. Water is brought from wells and springs outside of the city. Women usually carry jars on their heads or in their hands. Male servants carry water in large goat skins on their backs. Frequent visits are made by male servants to springs and wells especially during feasts and banquets.

Jesus told his disciples to follow the man they would find carrying water. The streets were crooked and without names and numbers so this was the easiest way to direct them to the lodging house. The disciples were probably unfamiliar with Jerusalem. Perhaps this was their first visit to the Holy City. Jesus had to stay in the

lodging house because the city was crowded and no one could give a room in their home for thirteen men. Today strangers, unfamiliar with a city, question shepherds, vineyard workers and water carriers about a place of abode. Abraham's servant did the same when he enquired of Rebekah (Genesis 24 : 23).



THE LORD'S SUPPER

And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take eat: this is my body.

And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it.

And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Mark 14 : 22-24.

The Synoptic Gospels state the Lord's Supper was celebrated on the fifteenth of Nisan according to the Jewish calendar. This was Thursday in Holy Week and is in harmony with the Jewish customs observed at festivals. The days of preparation for the feast and the days immediately following are regarded as holy but the Passover day is the holiest of all the days. Assyrian Christians observe the Jewish feast of the Passover on Thursday and the Resurrection of Christ on Sunday. The *Kor-bana*, eucharist or thanksgiving, is observed on both days but Easter is the greatest day of the festival.

Jesus and his disciples left Bethany on Thursday morning and preparations were made for the evening. Every Jew observed the Passover to commemorate the exodus from Egypt. This custom still prevails. A room was secured at an inn without the cost of rent but the bread, lamb and other supplies for the meal were purchased from the owner of the inn.

When the meal was ready, the group sat on the floor in the Eastern manner. Lamb and bread were placed on a cloth spread on the floor. There were no knives and forks. The bread was broken with the fingers and the meat picked up from the common dish with the bread.

During the supper sops or portions were exchanged as a token of friendship (cf. Genesis 43 : 34). This is why Judas thought Jesus did not know who was to betray him.

Jesus took the bread, blessed it and broke it and gave it to the disciples saying, "Take eat: this is my body." Hitherto Jesus and his disciples had celebrated the Pass-over by eating bread and lamb in commemoration of the lamb slain in Egypt. Now Jesus was to be slain like the lamb. "This is my body" means I will be slain like this lamb. When you do this again, do it in memory of me and not of the lamb slain in Egypt. He was the Saviour of the world.

After they had eaten the bread, he took the cup of wine. This is the custom of Easterners who drink after they have eaten and not while eating. He then gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, "This is my blood of the new testament which is shed for many." The blood of the lamb placed on the door posts of the Jews saved them from the slaughter of the angel in Egypt. The blood of Jesus which was to be shed on the cross would save both Jew and Gentile and redeem the world from sin. Christ had made an everlasting offering, acceptable to God, and the sacrifices of lambs and other animals were no longer necessary. Henceforth the disciples were to drink the wine in memory of his triumphant death and resurrection. The bread and wine are symbolical of spiritual body and blood of Jesus. Matt. 26 : 26, 27; Luke 22 : 19, 20.



TEACHING IN THE TEMPLE

I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled.

Mark 14 : 49.

Teaching in the temple does not mean preaching to a congregation in the temple proper but speaking to those who would listen in the outer courtyard of the tem-

ple. As public halls are unknown, Easterners often gather in church courtyards to discuss religious and political matters. Only religious services of worship are held in the church.

Jesus did not preach in the temple proper nor did he debate with the people in the holy of holies or other places where the high priests preached to their congregations. This would have been impossible. The high priests would not have allowed it because it would be against established custom. Jesus in his teaching and preaching constantly condemned the hierarchy and the wrong uses of the temple.

The temple was composed of many units. The high priest only could enter the holy of holies and in the holy places of worship, only Jews entered to pray and listen to the preachings of the priests but in the outer or Gentile Courts, people from all parts of the Oriental world gathered. Here the priests transacted parts of the temple business, Jews and Gentiles carried on their occupations, settled their differences, held debates and social meetings. Jesus did his preaching here.

The synagogue was a later development after the Babylonian exile and does not follow the temple plan. The synagogue was a preaching centre. Matt. 26 : 55.



THEY COVERED HIS FACE

And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophecy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands.

Mark 14 : 65.

Jesus was condemned for the blasphemy of making himself equal with God. When a man was condemned for crime or blasphemy, everybody spat on his face, signifying they had no part in his guilt and actions. The condemned man was also considered unclean, not to be touched or looked at. Holy men who considered themselves pious would have felt defiled if they had acci-

dentally looked at a condemned man. The high priests and other Jewish dignitaries would have refused to look on the face of one who had made himself the Son of God. When these men passed by Jesus, they turned their faces away from him so as to avoid seeing him. This was after the high priest had convicted him and condemned him as a blasphemer.

Jesus' face was covered because it was smeared with blood. The Jews do not like to see blood. It was a common Oriental custom to cover the face of a man condemned to death, as was done to Haman. Esther 7 : 8.



EXPOSED BY SPEECH

And he denied it again. And a little after, they that stood by said again to Peter, Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilæan, and thy speech agreeth thereto.

Mark 14 : 70.

Peter spoke Galilean or northern Aramaic, a dialect somewhat different in pronunciation and expression from Jewish or Chaldean Aramaic. Peter understood what the maid said but tried to avoid an answer so as not to arouse suspicion. In the sixty-eighth verse of this chapter, Peter said he did not understand but the maid insisted he was one of Jesus' followers judging from his speech. The Eastern text reads "for you also are a Galilean, and even your speech is like theirs." Any Galilean, found in the high priest's courtyard on that occasion, would have been suspected. Peter's speech betrayed him. His curses were characteristic of Assyrians and northern Aramaic speech. Today many disputes are settled by cursing and swearing and when a man wants to evade an issue, he will say, I do not understand you. Matt. 26 : 70; Luke 22 : 5; John 18 : 18.

"In Palestinian Aramaic the dialect of Galilee was different from that of Judea, and as a result of the religious separation of the Jews and the Samaritans, a special Samaritan dialect was evolved, but its literature cannot

be considered Jewish. To the eastern Aramaic, whose most distinctive point of difference is "n" in place of "y" as the prefix for the third person masculine of the imperfect tense of the verb, belong the idioms of the Babylonian Talmud, which most closely agree with the language of the Mandaean writings."*

THE GALILEAN DIALECT

The Aramaic language has three dialects. Northern or Galilean Aramaic was the dialect spoken by Assyrians. It gained much importance and became known as the *lingua franca* because of the rise and growth of the Assyrian Empire during the eleventh century B.C. Princes and noblemen of neighboring lands used it as the medium for diplomacy and commerce (cf 2 Kings 18 : 26). After the fall of the Assyrian Empire, this language was so deeply established it continued to be used by the Babylonian and Persian conquerors in communications with officials in Palestine, Asia Minor, Egypt and Arabia. It has been the literary language of the Assyrians up to the present day. It is still spoken by some Assyrians. Southern or Chaldaean Aramaic was spoken by the Jews of Judaea whose forefathers were carried captive into Babylon. Western Aramaic, known as Aramaean, was the language of the Syrian kingdom as far back as the days of Abraham. It was, however, displaced by northern Aramaic after the conquest of Syria by the Assyrians. (722 B.C.).

The northern dialect was the language of Galilee from the days when the ten tribes were carried away into Assyria and large Assyrian colonies transported to Galilee and Samaria. (cf 2 Kings 17 : 24ff). This was the dialect spoken by Jesus and his disciples.

The differences between these three dialects are in pronunciation and colloquialisms rather than in grammati-

*W. Bacher on "Aramaic Language among the Jews." By special permission. From "The Jewish Encyclopedia" Vol. II, copyright by Funk & Wagnalls Company, New York and London.

cal constructions. For instance, the northern Aramaic *kh* is pronounced like *h* in southern and western Aramaic; thus *mshikha* becomes *mshiha* in southern Aramaic and *mshiho* in the western dialect; *a* at the end of a word is always pronounced as *o* in the western dialect. Colloquialisms often cause misunderstanding and confusion. A man speaking southern Aramaic would say, "I have given birth to wealth and many sheep," which means these have increased. Such an expression would not be understood by one using northern Aramaic. In much the same way a southerner would be puzzled to hear a northerner say, "I have eaten my body and drunk my blood to build this house," meaning he has endured many sacrifices and hardships.

Peter spoke the northern dialect with its peculiar accent. This roused the suspicions of the high priest's maid servant who spoke the southern dialect. She knew Peter was not a Jew but a Galilean. Although Peter emphatically denied his Lord, he could not disguise his nationality and speech. Matt. 26 : 73; Luke 22 : 59.



VICTIMS SCOURGED BEFORE EXECUTION

And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified.

And the soldiers led him away into the hall, called Praetorium; and they call together the whole band.

Mark 15 : 15.

In Palestine, it was the custom to scourge victims before they were crucified. After the prisoners were condemned, they were turned over to soldiers to be mocked and whipped. Some governors watched the victims punished. Others never saw them again after sentence had been pronounced.

Easterners, on such occasions, did not restrain their

temper toward a condemned man. They wanted to share in punishing him and the soldiers allowed them to do as they pleased. So prisoners were severely punished before being brought to execution; at times they died in the hands of a mob. This was why Jesus was so weak he was unable to bear his cross. He had been severely beaten at the palace of the high priest. When Pilate pronounced the sentence and handed him over to the Jews to be scourged, the whole crowd shared in punishing him. In their eyes, Jesus was a heretic and blasphemer who had made himself equal to God. They readily shared the responsibility of compelling him to pay for his acts against their religion. When men are stoned, everyone throws stones at them, even women and little children. Matt. 27 : 26; John 19 : 1.



WOMEN AT THE SEPULCHRE

And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun.

Mark 16 : 2.

It is an old established custom among Semites to visit the grave of the dead on the third day. It is believed the soul of the departed returns on the third day to say farewell to the body. At this reunion, the dead returns to life for a short time and realizes he is dead and buried in the grave. Relatives and friends of the deceased never fail to go to the cemetery and wait at the grave.

The ceremony is generally attended by a group of women mourners who burn incense and sit in a circle around the grave. While the incense is burning the women weep mournfully. They call the dead by name and converse with him as if he were alive, believing he sees them and hears their words even though they cannot see him.

Jesus died on Friday. The women came to the grave early Sunday morning, the third day. They wanted to burn incense and say farewell to their beloved Lord. They

did not expect he would rise up although he had told them the Son of man must die and rise again that the Scriptures might be fulfilled. To their surprise, they found the grave empty and were greeted by an angel who told them Jesus had risen. Matt. 28 : 1; Luke 24 : 3; John 20 : 1.



MIRACLES

And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues.

Mark 16 : 17.

The Aramaic word for miracle is *tedmorta* derived from *damar* to be seized with astonishment or surprise. The Arabic word *ajaban* means wonder. The phrase, "it is a miracle" is very common in Aramaic speech but it does not mean that something extraordinary has happened. Anything which causes wonder is called a miracle. The solution of a problem or the achievement of a difficult task is regarded as a miracle. When a sick man recovers, people say it is a miracle. The same expression is used when a woman shows economy by feeding her family and guests with a few loaves of bread.

We must distinguish between miracles such as raising the dead and opening the eyes of the blind from wonders done by the sheer force of acts. In the realms of the spirit, faith, prayer and Christian living are the means by which true miracles are performed. For a blind man to receive his sight today, is a miracle just as it was when Jesus gave sight to the blind.

We also need to distinguish between the miracles worked by Jesus to help suffering humanity and his persuasive teaching through parables which impressed and amazed the people. Miraculous powers have been exhibited through the centuries by the followers of Jesus. Matt. 21 : 15; Luke 23 : 8.



HANDLING SERPENTS

They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. Mark 16 : 18.

It is not unusual for one to see snakes and scorpions crawling on the floor of Oriental houses. The ceilings, made of straw and branches of trees, are often infested with bird and snake nests. Snakes enter a house in search of food and water. They are picked up by babies who play with them but are seldom harmed. Some families are so accustomed to snakes in their homes they do not molest them nor are they harmed by them. Others who try to exterminate them are often bitten.

"They shall take up serpents" should not be taken literally. It does not mean men should attempt to pick them up to see whether the scriptures are right or wrong. Such an act is merely a test of the validity of the scriptures. The reference here is to those who pick up a snake by mistake or tread on one unknowingly. In such cases, if the person has faith in God, he will be protected. Snakes also know that the person who picks them up in error does not do it with any harmful intention and therefore does not harm them. When a man deliberately picks up a snake, he maintains fear and this fear makes the snake suspicious and afraid. Snakes are wise. Matt. 10 : 16.

This is also true of poison. Easterners, in order to dispose of enemies in an easy way, generally invite them to their homes and then poison the food. It often happens guests thus poisoned are not affected and others recover because they are unaware of the poison in the food and therefore they are not afraid. When a man drinks poison and knows it is poison, fear destroys the vitality and resistance of his body and results in death.

There is nothing in the gospel to show that Jesus ever picked up a snake to prove what he said was true. He never tried to change stones into bread when he was hungry in the desert nor did he ever do anything purposely to show his divine power. He always had faith in

God his Father who was aware of the dangers and needs of those who trusted him. Luke 10 : 19.



2—AMEN

And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen. Mark 16 : 20.

Amen is an Aramaic word derived from *amena* meaning faithful, sincere, truthful. Its adverbial form is *amenait*, always. When a priest or a prince makes a statement the people generally respond by saying Amen to indicate their ready acceptance and belief. When oral laws are enacted and proclaimed, the people raise their hands and say Amen as a mark of approval and loyalty.

The phrase *Amen, Amen*, truly, truly, often occurs in the gospels. It is used to emphasize the importance of what is about to be said. Words are repeated in Aramaic and Hebrew for emphasis. The word Amen, placed at the end of letters, documents and books, is the equivalent of a seal. Matt. 6 : 13.



ST. LUKE

Luke was an early Jewish convert to Christianity. His early life, background and conversion are not known. Eusebius tells us that Luke was from Ephesus.

St. Paul in his epistle to the Colossians called him healer, or physician (Colossians 4 : 14). Some writers assert that he travelled with Paul attending him as a doctor, but this can hardly be granted. In the first place Paul was a poor man and had to work his way through and endure many privations, and he could hardly attempt to have a physician travelling with him, even though at times he complained of sickness. Such luxuries were not dreamed of by the apostles and the early missionaries, who had to suffer imprisonment because of the teaching of their Lord.

Luke was *Assia*, meaning healer, according to the Eastern text. He was not a surgeon, physician and dispenser of medicine. He was probably a spiritual healer like some of the religious men in the East today or one who practiced spiritual healing and adjusted dislocated bones. Such professions are not acquired by medical training, but are handed down from father to son. Nor do healers depend on it for their living. Some healers are engaged as farmers and sheep raisers and in business. Luke was one type of an Oriental healer. Luke was the only companion of Paul in Rome (2 Timothy 4-11). St. Paul in his epistle to Philemon calls him "my fellow-worker". (Phil. 24.)

Luke's authorship of the third gospel is chiefly supported by external evidence. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and the Muratorian canon state that Luke was the author of the third gospel and of the Acts of the Apostles. These assertions are not based on facts but are conjectural and debatable. Modern scholarship doubts

this, but does not help to solve the problem of the authorship of these two valuable documents.

Considerable material has been accumulated both in support and against Luke's authorship of these books which cannot be here discussed. But there is no reason to doubt Luke's authorship. The evangelist had been on many missionary journeys. He must have been in possession of documentary evidence written by the apostles. These could have been none other than the Gospels and it is inconceivable that Paul would have carried any other Christian writings with him. This fact explains his references to the teachings of Jesus. He was with Paul when the latter wrote from Rome to Timotheus asking him to bring with him Mark and the books, especially the scrolls which he had left with Carpus at Troas. (2 Timothy 4-13.) Then again Eastern Christians have never questioned Luke's authorship of the gospel.

The style of the gospel is similar to that of the Acts of the Apostles. It was either copied from scrolls for a prominent man named Theophilus or composed from material with which Luke was familiar. The author used other oral and written sources which are not found in the other gospels. He omitted what he found to be objectionable to the people for whom his gospel was intended. This is still characteristic of missionaries. As an example, an American missionary could not introduce easily to the Armenians, a gospel, if it contained some material favorable to the Turks. Another missionary of the same denomination, if he happened to be working among the Turks, would stress this more than any other portion of the Scriptures.

It is interesting to note that Luke traced the genealogy of Jesus to David, through Nathan and not Solomon. He avoided the kingly line because his gospel was written for the Jews in Galilee, Syria and Asia Minor who had lost their national aspiration, and some of them hated the kings of Judah and blamed them for the downfall of Israel.

EYEWITNESSES

Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;

Luke 1 : 2.

The reference here is to the scrolls containing the narrative and the sayings of Jesus, as well as oral traditions handed down by those who had been with Jesus and were eyewitnesses and ministers. Eyewitnesses were the authors of this material who were not only familiar with the current testimony concerning Jesus but had also actually heard him preach and seen him die on the Cross. It was from them that Luke derived most of the material not found in Matthew or Mark.

These early sacred writings were the basis for other documents produced about the life and teaching of our Lord. As additional material was discovered, it was embodied in these writings but in every case the writers examined it very carefully before adopting it. In those early days, the Scriptures were just beginning to be written. They had not yet been canonized. Owners of manuscripts and scribes were at liberty to omit or to add to their own books. At that time there was no established church to pass judgment on documents and newly discovered material about Jesus and his teaching.



AUTHOR'S QUALIFICATIONS

It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus,

Luke 1 : 3.

Luke was probably a Palestinian Jew who had assumed a Greek name. Many Jews used Greek and Roman names. This is one of the characteristics of eastern peo-

ple who, in the interest of business or to gain favor in the eyes of conquerors, change their names. Foreigners do this to-day in the United States.

The writer of the Gospel according to Saint Luke, whoever he may have been, was acquainted with the disciples of Jesus and their followers. He had heard traditions concerning Jesus and had read documents written by eye-witnesses who had seen and heard Jesus. The writer, with this unique opportunity and knowledge, examined the evidence and weighed the facts in composing his new and more convincing document. He omitted some material and changed other material which did not harmonize with certain narratives. For example, like Matthew he traced the genealogy of Christ to David, but unlike Matthew who traced through the kingly line, Luke traced through Nathan another son of David. Luke also included in his Gospel the story of the birth of John which is not found in the earlier documents.

These changes were probably made to overcome prejudices. Galilean and Samaritan Christians would have had no interest in the royal Davidic descent of Jesus because the enmity between the house of David in Judah and the ten tribes of the North still survived. Luke tried to make a compromise so as to commend the Gospel to the peoples of both the north and the south.



THEOPHILUS' FAITH AFFIRMED

*That thou mightest know the certainty of those things,
wherein thou hast been instructed.* Luke 1 : 4.

Theophilus had become a convert to Christianity through the story of the life and sayings of Jesus which were now widely circulated and popular among the people. But, at this time, there were many written scrolls and confusing stories which perplexed men like Theophilus. They varied widely. Some stated Jesus was descended from David but no descendant of David's royal

family had been heard of at that time. The high priests and scribes were totally ignorant of the existence of any heirs to the house of David. Jehoiachin, the last king of the Davidic dynasty, was carried captive by the Chaldeans about 500 years previous. (2 Kings 25 : 27). Even the Maccabees did not dare to connect themselves with the famous house of David. The Jews, however, literally expected the Messiah to come from the line of David or from the house of David.

Although Luke traced Jesus to Nathan, son of David, he was concerned about the teaching of Jesus and his mission. He tried to impress Theophilus with the truth of the words of Christ, whereby he had been converted, and he emphasized the works of the Saviour to him.



HEROD, THE GREAT


There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.

Luke 1 : 5.

Herod the Great was king of Judea and the son of Antipater the founder of the Herodian dynasty. He was an Idumaeon by race, but a Jew by faith. His father served in the Roman army, during the Roman Conquest of Palestine and Egypt, and won favors in the eyes of Roman generals in Syria. He was a friend of Anthony, at whose request he was appointed king of Judea 40 B.C. After the capture of Jerusalem and the overthrow of the Hasmonaeon Dynasty he became sole ruler of Palestine. He married Mariamne an Hasmonaeon princess, whom he killed later with her two sons Aristobulus and Antigonus. This dastardly act on his part put an end to the Hasmonaeon house, and established Herod and his sons as the sole heirs of this newly formed kingdom.

Herod, like his father, knew how to please Roman emperors and their high officials in Syria. He imposed high taxes in order to keep his post. He also built a mag-

nificent temple to please the Jews. But the Jews hated him because he was not a Jew by birth. Even though he tried to show that he was a benefactor of their religion, he had no use for the Jews themselves. The Jews and the Idumaeans always hated each other. Matt. 2 : 1.




A BARREN WOMAN

And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.

Luke 1 : 7.

The Eastern version reads "They had no son because Elisabeth had become barren." Strange as it may seem, an eastern woman, though she may give birth to five or six girls, is often called childless if she has no son. Girls do not inherit property from their parents so a male heir is important. In Elisabeth's case, she probably had daughters but no son and at the time of the angel's visitation, because of her age, she was barren. This was why it was difficult for Zechariah to believe the words which the angel spoke to him.



STRONG DRINK

For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.

Luke 1 : 15.

Nazarites were holy men, consecrated to God, and a type of prophet. They abstained from strong drink because they could not receive God's messages if distracted or confused by drink.

Bishops and other high ecclesiastical authorities, to-day are always selected from the ranks of the Nazarites.

This ancient custom still prevails among the Assyrians,

and the Nazarites are found in their midst. Bishops and other high ecclesiastical authorities are always elected from their ranks. Assyrian Nazarites, known as *Nater Kursey*, abstain from the use of meat, from shaving the head or face, and from marriage. They are dedicated to God's work and are called *Nazirey*, that is, those who have taken vows.

Hebrews believed life remained in the hair after death. This is because hair continues to grow after death. It is also a symbol of strength as in the case of Samson. (Judges 16 : 19) Hebrew Nazarites abstained from strong drink and shaving. Samuel and Samson were both Nazarites.



THE KINGDOM WITHOUT LIMIT

*And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever;
and of his kingdom there shall be no end. Luke 1 : 33.*

The Eastern version reads, "There will be no limit to his kingdom." In ancient times, the Euphrates River and the Mediterranean Sea were considered the ends of the world. The Kingdoms of Palestine were limited in territory and the people were ignorant of the great empires of the world. Oriental kings were known by the size of their kingdoms; the larger the kingdom, the more famous the king. Kings and rulers always aspired for more territory. They were never satisfied with the size of their kingdom. Their great ambition was to extend their borders.

The ancient kingdoms in Palestine embraced less than a hundred square miles. Before the occupation of the country by Israelites, each city had its own king and laws. The limits of a city were its own walls. The Davidic kingdom was quite small when compared with the empires of Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greece. The borders of these empires were beyond the geographical conception of the Hebrew people. They extended from the Medi-

terranean Sea to the Indian Ocean. They embraced the whole known world.

Interpreted, the reference means the Messianic kingdom would be unlimited. It would penetrate areas hitherto unknown and would include people of all races and all countries and would cover a territory larger than any emperor ever dreamed of ruling. The Prince of Peace will rule forever and the message of the Gospel will be good for all time regardless of geographical or racial barriers.



BLESSEDNESS

*For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden:
for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me
blessed.* Luke 1 : 48.

With the exception of Turkey, there is very little change in the position of women in eastern countries since Biblical days. Women are mostly considered inferior and unimportant except mothers of heroes and heirs apparent to thrones. They are highly respected and admired. Easterners are polygamists. Kings marry many wives. When a prince ascends a throne, his mother's position is immediately elevated and her authority increased. There are times when mothers of great men are invited to sit in counsel with the leaders of the state but this is exceptional and contrary to Eastern custom. Bathsheba, mother of Solomon, king of Israel, served him in an advisory capacity. When Adonijah wanted to marry Abishag, the Shunammite, he sought to have Bathsheba intercede for him (1 Kings 2 : 17). The highest ambition of an eastern mother is to see her son occupying an exalted position. When a son's name is mentioned, it is coupled with the name of his mother. In the Books of Kings and The Chronicles, the mothers of kings are always mentioned.

The Aramaic word, *tova*, means envy. "All generations shall call me blessed" shows that Mary realized she would

be envied because as the mother of the Prince of Peace reigning forever, she would share this everlasting honor with her son.



THE MERCY OF GOD

And her neighbours and her cousins heard how the Lord had shewed great mercy upon her; and they rejoiced with her. Luke 1 : 58.

The eastern text reads "God had increased his mercy," meaning God had multiplied his favor. In the first place, he had promised Zacharias and Elisabeth a child thus removing the reproach upon a barren woman. In the second place, this child was a male. A male child to perpetuate the family is regarded as a special blessing of God. He remembered his servants Abraham and Sarah.



THE HORN OF SALVATION

And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David. Luke 1 : 69.

Before silver and brass musical instruments were known, horns of rams and oxen were used for the army and for worship. A small hole was made in the narrow end of the horn into which the musician blew. When the Jews had encircled Jericho, the priests blew with the horns of rams until the walls fell. (Joshua 6 : 4)

When conquering armies entered a city, the musicians raised their horns in the air and blew lustily. When a defeated army returned, the musical instruments were pointed to the ground and the music was melancholy and in a minor key to express the distress and sorrow of the soldiers. The musicians hung their heads. This was also the practice at funerals.

"Hath raised up an horn of salvation for us" means

he has defeated our enemies and brought our forces back with horns raised and shouting the songs of victory. The gospel of Jesus is a gospel of triumph, proclaimed in every land and tongue. It brings victory and release to believers.



A BOY'S OCCUPATION

And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

Luke 1 : 80.

In lands where public schools and factories are unknown, boys of six or seven years of age are assigned to take care of sheep and cattle. This is an important occupation and most boys are taught it early in life as a means of livelihood.

Sheep are usually pastured at a distance from the village and the shepherds remain with them all the year round. In the spring and summer months women and children live in tents in the desert where the sheep are pastured. The word "desert" does not always mean an arid place but an open country not inhabited. The Aramaic word *khorba* means a place without inhabitants. In many parts of the Arabian Desert, in the region of the Euphrates River and on the borders of Palestine, thousands of sheep and camels are found. The natives live in tents and move from place to place seeking grass for their flocks.

When some boys grow to manhood they return to their home to take up other tasks. This is why John remained in the desert minding the sheep until he reached manhood in the same way that David did. He then returned to his village probably to carry on the work of his father who was a priest, or to engage in some other occupation. But the inner voice led him to undertake the mission of being a herald of the Messiah.



PURIFICATION

And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord. Luke 2 : 22.

After the birth of a child a mother is considered unclean for forty days. She is not allowed to bake bread, cook or touch sacred things, nor can she pray or go to church. Both mother and child have to be sanctified on the fortieth day. This custom is still practiced by Assyrian Christians and other races of the east.

Jewish children are circumcised eight days after their birth. Arabs and other Mohammedans circumcise their boys when they are thirteen years old. This is because Ishmael was thirteen years old when Isaac was only eight days old. God appeared to Abraham, commanding him to circumcise every male born in the community. Circumcision has to do with the entrance of the child into the society of men, after which he becomes a member of the church. This is equivalent to Christian baptism. In the east as soon as a child is baptized he becomes a full pledged member of the church. Both baptism and confirmation take place the same day. Assyrian priests are empowered to exercise the office of confirmation. Both ceremonies take place at the same time. Purification has more to do with the mother.



JESUS LOST IN THE TEMPLE

And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. Luke 2 : 43.

Most of the ancient Assyrian churches are built similar to Jewish Temples. The church has many chapels but the most sacred place is the Holy of Holies where the sacrament is consecrated, and which is entered

only by the priest and his deacons during the services. The chapels are one for baptism, another for evening and morning prayer, a sacristy for vestments and other sacred articles, and the main temple is for prayer on Sundays and feast days. In this latter place men and women, boys and girls are separated during the services. The men stand at the front facing the Holy of Holies, and behind them are the young men and then the boys. Behind this group are the girls, while the women stand at the end of the temple.

Some boys are trained as singers for the religious services. They assist the priests and elders who read the holy scriptures close to the Holy of Holies. They encircle a book near the entrance to the Holy of Holies. Other boys often come here even though uninvited. The place offers a vantage point for seeing the Holy of Holies and to hear priests and deacons chanting within the walls of the Holy of Holies. At the end of the service, the deacons and choristers sit down to eat bread and other foods brought by worshipers as an offering to God.

When Mary, Joseph and Jesus entered the temple in Jerusalem, Mary went to the women's court near the treasury, called in Aramaic, *Beth-Gaza*. Women were not allowed to participate in the holy ceremonies, nor to stand by the side of the men during the ceremonies. Joseph and Jesus then went directly to the front of the temple and took their respective places. Jesus was so impressed that after the service he remained and was invited to share in the sacrificial meal. This was followed by religious discussion and debates, when provincial Rabbis often clashed with the Rabbis and priests of Jerusalem. In the east such debates and quarrels in church are not unusual. This is how Jesus was led to speak and his stay was prolonged.

Joseph and Mary supposed that Jesus had gone with the other boys and girls who usually formed their own party on such days. Feasts are the only occasions when boys and girls are permitted to come together and talk to each other. Children usually march ahead of the caravan and go back to their parents only when they feel

hungry. When Jesus left the learned men in the temple he began to search for his parents in the temple and the other courts, and when he failed to find them he returned to the place where the Rabbis were still debating.

Meanwhile the caravan had started and it was not long before Mary and Joseph found that Jesus was not with the children. They therefore hurried back to Jerusalem thinking that something must have happened to him. After enquiring at their lodging place and at the inns where their neighbors were staying, they went to the temple and found him sitting with learned men of Jerusalem. They told him about their frantic search, and his reply was, "Did you not know that I was to be in my Father's house"? That is to say "I had no other place to go but to wait for you in the temple." Jesus felt that his parents would know that he would be with the Rabbis, and be late in leaving the temple, as he was accustomed to do in Nazareth.



THE SILENT YEARS

And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart.

And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man. Luke 2 : 51, 52.

An Eastern boy is subject to his parents until he reaches manhood. Even after his marriage he is still guided by their counsels. It is a period in life when an Oriental boy is not recognized. No matter how brilliant he may be, his counsel is not considered. It is only after he is thirty years of age that he sits in the counsel of the elders and is regarded with respect. In the East, the importance of a man is determined by age. What a young man says does not count.

It was the same with Jesus. Nothing is known about the life of Jesus between the ages of twelve and thirty but he was engaged in the work of a shepherd or a

farmer, most likely that of a farmer. Most of his teaching reflects first-hand knowledge of seeds and sheep. When not employed he sat around and listened to the elders talk about religious and political problems. This was about the only kind of education most lads received. It is so today in Arabia, Kurdistan and other countries where there are no schools.

Jesus was never a student in Egypt or India as some have suggested. All his teaching was illustrated by stories of the common, everyday life of the people in the region around the Lake of Galilee. There is nothing in his Gospel message alien to Semitic ideas and ideals nor is there anything in the four Gospels to indicate he had visited any lands outside of Palestine.

Where was Jesus during these eighteen years? The answer is, where were the other prophets and leaders of whom we know nothing until they become prominent? Today we know little of the lives of youths while they are obtaining their experience. It is not until they have accomplished something worth while that they obtain a reputation.



TWO SHIRTS

He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Luke 3 : 11.

While some men and women have more than one robe and many shirts, there are others who walk without garments, partly naked or wearing worn-out clothes. Beggars usually are barely covered, not because they cannot obtain garments but because it is a custom. If any part of the body is uncovered it signifies poverty and distress.

Some of the Easterners give away their extra shirts or loan them to those who are in need and to their neighbors. Food likewise is shared during times of famine and

families who have stored abundant food distribute it among the poor of the town.



WAGES AND GRAFT

And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages. Luke 3 : 14.

Soldiers of old Eastern autocratic governments were looked upon as sons of the kings. In many respects their authority was higher than that of the civil officials because they were the defenders of the crown and gave their lives for country and ruler. Soldiers were, therefore, the spoiled children of the king and at times were free to do whatever they pleased. Their wages, however, were very small and as Eastern governments were generally bankrupt, civil officials paid themselves first and then, if any money remained, a small portion of the salary due was paid to the soldiers. They were content with this pay when they received it but often they were left unpaid for years. When money was appropriated from the treasuries of the central governments for soldiers' salaries, the red tape involved again deprived them of their due because as the money was transferred from one department to another, each official took a share. The money melted like ice and the soldier was left out. So soldiers depended on authority and force for a living and, although they were also under authority, they did as they pleased because superiors permitted them to rob and collect false taxes on a commission basis. Travelers were robbed and towns looted by soldiers. When regiments were transferred from one place to another, small villages suffered heavy losses. The soldiers took money, animals, clothing and food.

Today the stipend remains very small. Before the World War, Turkish soldiers were paid about one dollar a month and Persian soldiers were paid only about thirty cents a month.

The soldiers who came to Jesus may have been captains. Officers were guilty of the injustices practiced on the public because they were not satisfied with their own stipends and sent privates out to extract money from citizens by unjust means.



ADAM THE SON OF GOD

*Which was the son of Enos, which was the son of Seth,
which was the son of Adam, which was the son of God.*

Luke 3 : 38.

The Eastern version reads *Min-Allaha*, of God, which means created by God. Luke traced the genealogy of Jesus to David through his son Nathan and not through Solomon, the king, as Matthew did. From David back to Adam, Luke used the general genealogy found in the book of Genesis. Genesis and most of the Old Testament books were written many centuries after David.

The Aramaic word for son is *bar*. This word was used by Luke throughout the genealogy from Joseph back to Adam. But according to the Eastern text when Luke referred to Adam, he used the Aramaic preposition *min*, from or of, instead of the noun *bar*, son. Due to the mutilation of the early manuscripts or to a misunderstanding, the Greek translators misread the Aramaic *min* for *bar*.

Luke evidently did not agree with Matthew that Jesus was a descendant of David through the royal family. He knew Jesus was rejected by the Pharisees and priests on the grounds he was not a descendant of the royal family. Also, Luke was writing for Galileans, Syrians and Idumaeans who would not want to claim Jesus a descendant of the royal family of David. The people of these regions were enemies of the Jewish royal family. Luke seemingly tried to compromise so as not to offend the Christian Jews in the south and yet satisfy the prejudices of those in the north. No objection would have been raised by the north to tracing the descent of Jesus back to Nathan whose descendants never ascended the throne. Nearly a

thousand years had elapsed since Nathan and his descendants could no longer be called princely but the lineage of Solomon had continued until after the Babylonian captivity.



STRIKING A STONE

For it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee:

And in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Luke 4 : 10, 11.

The Eastern version reads, "so that even your foot may not strike a stone." Oriental courtyards are paved with large stones. Stones and rocks are also strewn about the streets and thoroughfares of towns and villages. People often stumble over them and are hurt. Children and older people sometimes fall from the house tops to the courtyards and are injured on the stones.

The courtyard of the temple at Jerusalem was paved with large stones. When the devil tempted Jesus to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the temple, he assured him not even his foot would touch a stone if he really was the Messiah he claimed to be. In the East, people often say to each other "The road is safe. Everything will be all right. Even your foot will not strike a stone." This means you will reach your destination safely without any trouble or misfortune. Matt. 4 : 5.



JESUS READING SCRIPTURES

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. Luke 4 : 16.

The Eastern version reads "as was the custom." Jewish services were held on the Sabbath day. Synagogue attendance was optional for the laity and, in case

of any important business, the people were justified in absenting themselves. Jesus was not a rabbi, so it was not compulsory for him to attend the synagogue regularly but, like most pious Jews, he did attend frequently. On this occasion Jesus was invited to read the Scriptures and to address the congregation.

It is still the custom for competent laymen to assist in the services by reading certain parts of the Scriptures and commenting on them. Synagogues and churches are kept open all the time for any who desire to enter and pray.



SCROLL

And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. Luke 4 : 20.

A scroll is a long piece of parchment about four and a half inches wide and five to twenty feet long, according to the size of the document. It is made of the skin of animals. The skin is first soaked in a solution made of ashes and the hair is removed and the skin is washed, dried and smoothed.

Before paper was invented, and manufactured at Bagdad, about the ninth century A.D., writing was done on scrolls made from the skin of young animals. Two small pieces of wood were fastened at each end of the scroll so that it might be rolled both ways. Paper scrolls containing sacred writings, are still used in many parts of the East, where the art of bookbinding is unknown. Binding was a later invention. It probably began in the early part of the second century A.D. Until that time, all of our sacred scriptures and other writings were written on scrolls. Bookbinding was invented to preserve the sacred writings, and not because all the writings belonged to the same book. Scrolls were often loaned and the number given was forgotten and at times parts of

them were cut off. This could not be done with a book, where the pages are numbered. The loaning and stealing made it difficult for the scribes and copyists to obtain complete documents from which to copy. This is why some of our manuscripts of the same differ as to length and contents.



JESUS ESCAPING PUNISHMENT

And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,

And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong.

But he passing through the midst of them went his way, Luke 4 : 28-30.

The crowd seized Jesus and took him to the brow of the mountain to throw him down. They wanted to punish but not kill him. If they had desired to kill him, they would have stoned him in the town or slain him by a sword. They would not have troubled to take him to the brow of a mountain. In the east when a man blasphemes or does something worthy of a minor punishment, he is humiliated and disgraced. His beard or moustache is shaved or he is thrown into the water or he is publicly punished in some other way. The public gather to see the dishonor inflicted.

Jesus' remarks in the synagogue about the widow of Zarephath and Naaman, the Syrian, aroused the anger of the Nazarenes. They took him out to a hill behind the town. While some men were preparing to throw him down, and others were pleading for mercy on his behalf for the sake of Mary and Joseph, and the rest were debating and discussing, Jesus slipped through the dense crowd and disappeared.



INSANE MEN CONFESSING JESUS

And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ.
 Luke 4 : 41.

Demons came out of many men who were insane or crazy. According to the Aramaic version and Eastern manner of speech, when Jesus healed them, the men cried out and said "You are the Christ, the Son of God."* Devils would not have acknowledged Jesus' power and his divine sonship nor could they have spoken to him. Some of these men acknowledged Jesus in appreciation of his kindness to them but Jesus did not allow them to say much because he did not want the public to know he was Christ. His own disciples were not yet able to completely understand his divine mission and at times Jesus warned them not to say he was the Christ because such remarks would have been misunderstood and would have caused confusion and opposition from the Pharisees and priests. Also, some men would not believe such healings had taken place. For instance, after the blind man had been given his sight and his parents had testified he had been born blind and Jesus had healed him, the Pharisees would not believe. They doubted Jesus and his power to cure. Matt. 8 : 16; Mark 1 : 32; Luke 8 : 36.



SCRIBES

And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?
 Luke 5 : 21.

The Aramaic word *saprey*, scribes, is derived from *sepra*, reading or book. The Hebrew word for scribes is *sopherin*. It is derived from the same root and has the same meaning as the Aramaic.

*See Luke 4 : 41 in *The Gospels* translation by Geo. M. Lamsa, published by A. J. Holman Co.

Scribes were called so because they were professional copyists. Their work was to copy the Holy Scriptures and to read and write legal documents. In this way they had access to books and came to be known as authorities on the law. This authority was hard to dispute because books were rare and inaccessible to the public. The people looked to the scribes for spiritual and moral interpretation of the Scriptures as well as for legal advice. As this work was considered holy, no charge was made for the services. It was acquired freely and given freely. The Scribes were not lawyers in the sense we understand the term. They did not appear as barristers before ecclesiastical or civil courts. Their task was to read books and to explain their meaning. In those days, in some parts of the East, state and religious laws were one. This is so today and the practice is still carried on among Mohammedans who accept the law of the Koran as the law of the land. Those who can read and copy the sacred book of Islam are considered authorities on the law. There are other less important scribes whose work is the writing and copying of commercial and legal letters and documents. These men sit in the streets or in the tiny shops waiting for customers who cannot read or write. Mark 1 : 22.



EATING AND DRINKING

And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink? Luke 5 : 33.

Expressions regarding eating and drinking are very general in New Testament literature and still continue among Aramaic-speaking people and other Semites. He has eaten and drunk, means he is fed and well taken care of. "The Son of man is come eating and drinking," means he was living comfortably. It does not mean he was drinking wine as the reading of the text might suggest.

Water is scarce in Palestine. In some places there is abundant food but no water. A cup of cold water is therefore very precious. On the arrival of guests and strangers in the house, cold water is offered them first of all. Water is just as important as food. Aristocrats would not think of entertaining people unless they had abundant water. Their wives, daughters and servants are sent out to the springs and wells for water.

Wine is used at a marriage feast and on a few other occasions but it is seldom used by Orientals during a meal. Tea and coffee are unknown. An Eastern meal consists of food and water. Thus eating and drinking means a complete meal.

Some religious men deny themselves certain things which are considered luxuries. Others fast from food and water. John the Baptist followed this order. He fasted. Jesus accepted invitations and lived comfortably, that is to say, he ate what was put before him. He showed his religious character not through the social practices of food and drink but by his gracious and cordial ways of living, supplying the spiritual needs of mankind. Matt. 3 : 4; Mark 2 : 16.



OLD AND NEW WINE

No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better. Luke 5 : 39.

Although wine and strong drinks were first used in the East, Easterners drink little and know less about liquors. One hears of old wines in Europe and America as being the vintage of many years ago. This is not the case in the East where any wine over six months is called old. One can seldom find wine over a year old. Wine is made and drunk in the same year. The majority of people drink new wine. The grapes are crushed in October and the wine is ready in two weeks. Rich families who have large vineyards produce more wine which is kept

for the spring and summer months until the new wine is ready. It could not be kept longer because glass bottles are unknown. Wine loses its flavor and turns into vinegar when kept in goat skins or earthenware.

The Jews were jealous of their theology and ancient customs to which they were devoted. They were reluctant to change for a new teaching. The teachings of Jesus were new.



THE POOR

*And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said,
Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God.*

Luke 6 : 20.

Poverty is very common in all eastern countries. The people are divided into three classes: the rich, the poor and the nobleman. The rich are influential because of their wealth. A nobleman, whether he is rich or poor, is always highly respected but the general poor are despised. This is because of the belief that wealth is a blessing and poverty a curse. Men who desire to rule must therefore amass considerable wealth.

A man who is poor, generally remains poor and his descendants have the same lot in life because the poor are misruled and their property eaten by taxes and bribes. The poor have to support the central government and the needy noblemen as well as local officials. They carry the heavy burdens.

At the time of Jesus, the poor Jews were in a helpless economic condition. They were unorganized and without leadership and could not revolt or protest against the unjust system of taxation. This world seemed a hopeless place for them, but they believed they were to find comfort in the life hereafter. This was the class of people which expected a sudden Messianic appearance. They had turned their thoughts to the scriptures for consolation and were patiently waiting for God's reign when justice

would be executed and the rich would mourn while they themselves would be happy. The poor, in Aramaic, does not always mean poverty stricken. It also means the meek and poor in pride. Matt. 5 : 5; Mark 3 : 7.



REPROACH

Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake.

Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. Luke 6 : 22, 23.

Reproach and slander are common among the people of the East. In countries where newspapers, theatres and other amusements are unknown, gossip is the general pastime. When there is nothing else to talk about, they begin to discuss the family affairs, reputation and religion of their neighbors. Bishops, priests and missionaries are more exposed to such treatment, because they are outstanding leaders. Every unfamiliar act performed by them is at once suspected. False and malicious remarks about people are spread from mouth to mouth, and in the process they are exaggerated. What appeared at first to be an innocent act is thus made out to be a criminal offence.

The disciples of Jesus were not to escape such criticism. They would be regarded as lunatics and heretics, because their new teaching would be suspected and antagonized. They would be blamed for evils with which their teachings had nothing to do. This was unavoidable because the disciples would expose and correct false Jewish traditions and customs, and therefore suffer the consequences. Jesus thus warned them not to be dismayed or discouraged because such reactions of reproach were bound to be their lot. Matt. 5 : 12.



WORLDLY SATISFACTION

Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.
Luke 6 : 25.

In the east, when men become wealthy, they believe they are blessed by God no matter how their fortune has been accumulated. They rely on their earthly possessions for salvation although some have confiscated the property of the poor and others have acquired their wealth in other unjust ways.

This reference to the men who overlook the spiritual and are satisfied with worldly achievement tells them they will soon find out the emptiness of earthly possessions and regret their lack of spirituality, the possession of which is a treasure for the life here and hereafter.



LENDING AND BORROWING

Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. Luke 6 : 30.

The words "him that taketh away thy goods" imply they are taken by force but as it is a common Eastern custom to lend garments, food and animals to those who would borrow them, this is not the meaning.

Supplies are very scarce and neighbors depend on one another. Women go freely into each other's homes and even take articles without permission, returning them after they have used them. No one would refuse his neighbor because some day he will need his help. When neighborly relations are broken, borrowing becomes difficult. The people become distrustful and request the return of borrowed articles although possibly not needed at the time. The borrower is embarrassed because he may not then be able to return the wheat or oil or other articles borrowed.

Jesus wanted borrowing also to include strangers and even enemies. He knew such favors would be effective in producing friendship and peace among all people. Matt. 5 : 42.



REWARDS FOR FAVORS

And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.

Luke 6 : 31, 32.

The Aramaic according to the Eastern version reads "for if you love those that love you, what is your favor," that is to say, what favor do you do them?

Easterners lend money and do favors to those from whom they expect to receive favors. Precious gifts are given to government officials, politicians and those who are in power in exchange for favors. The poor find it very difficult to borrow money and wheat for seed because the lender does not trust them and he knows they can do nothing for him. Therefore, he turns them down. This discrimination also applies to guests. A rich man is lavishly entertained. A sheep or an ox is killed because when the host visits him, the same will be returned. A poor man is fed with bread and buttermilk because no return favors are expected from him.

Jesus wished his disciples to do favors to those who could not repay them in this world and he reminded them the heavenly Father would reward them in the life hereafter. Matt. 5 : 46.



THEY WILL POUR INTO YOUR ROBE

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

Luke 6 : 38.

Easterners often go from one house to another borrowing or buying a measure or a half measure of wheat. Most houses have their own measures and these vary in size. When the wheat is poured into the measure, if the good man of the house is doing the measuring for a neighbor or a friend from whom he expects favors, he shakes the measure several times to allow the wheat to settle and so fills it to the full. This courtesy is seldom shown to strangers who come from distant places. The wheat salesman knows that he will probably not see them again, and so he cheats them by not giving full measure. As the distance between houses is short and bags are scarce, the borrower or buyer of the wheat holds the end of his robe with both hands, and the wheat is poured into it. Easterners generally wear long flowing robes which are often used for carrying food stuffs, such as fruit, etc. This practice is still general in most countries of the Near East, and is followed by men and women. Matt. 7 : 2; Mark 4 : 4.



THE CENTURION

For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.

Luke 7 : 5.

This centurion may have been a Syrian or a Roman, and not necessarily a Jew by faith. Officers of ruling races, even though adherents of other faith, help to build sanctuaries for their subjects. This does not mean that they contribute money but they draft the people to

do the work. Easterners have invariably to be compelled to do things even for themselves. Cyrus was a Persian King, who levied heavy taxes and exacted gifts so as to build a Jewish Temple. This was also done by Herod the Idumean, who built a most magnificent Temple in Jerusalem. Some of these foreign officers, however, worshipped at the native sanctuaries because places of worship of their faith are not available. This is true even today when Turkish officers worship in christian shrines, because they have no mosques at such places. Matt. 8 : 5.



ORIENTAL FUNERALS

Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her.

Luke 7 : 12.

Cemeteries in the Orient were always outside cities and towns. Today cemeteries are often within the city but they were originally outside when the city was smaller. As the city expanded these cemeteries were included within its bounds as other locations were selected outside the city proper.

Dead people are carried out of the city but no dead man is allowed to be brought in. Even if a nobleman or a high official should die outside the city wall, his body can not be brought into the city. Easterners believe distress would reign in a city if a dead body were brought into it. The dead man is placed in a coffin, in some cases, wrapped in bed clothes and laid on a stretcher, and carried by friends of the deceased. The funeral is accompanied by priests, singers, men and women. The priests march at the head of the procession, then comes the coffin followed by members of the family and other mourners. When a certain point is reached outside the city, the pall bearers halt and the coffin is placed on the ground. Its position is then reversed and the head is

towards the city. At the start of the procession, the feet are towards the city. This brings out the idea that the dead man was forcibly dragged out the city by his hair, as it were, and now he has surrendered to the grave. While this change of position is made, the women sit in a circle around the coffin weeping, singing and taking their farewells for they are not permitted to accompany the dead any further. The burial is carried out only by men.

When Jesus was about to enter Nain, he was met by the funeral of the widow's son. It is very probable he came upon the scene when they were reversing the position of the coffin. He thus saw the panic-stricken widow wailing over her beloved son who would no longer be the comfort and support of her old age. Jesus had compassion on her and raised her son from the dead.



AN ALABASTER OF OIL

And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment.

And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.

Luke 7 : 37, 38.

Until modern machinery was introduced into the Holy Land and other parts of the east, oil was very scarce. Olive oil, so plentiful in some parts of the country, is scarce today in other parts. Small quantities of it are kept in small containers for anointing and medicinal purposes. In some places, where olive oil is scarce and expensive, sheep butter is used. 2 Kings 9 : 3.

Anointing with oil is an eastern custom dating from ancient days. Women after bathing anoint their heads with oil to keep the scalp soft. Men rub olive oil or butter on their heads and other parts of the body. Chapped hands and feet as well as wounds are often rubbed with

oil. Travelers, especially, use oil in this way to refresh their bodies after weary journeys. Rich and extravagant people use perfume and fragrant oils. In ancient days prophets and kings were anointed probably with butter carried in an ox horn. Perfume and liquid oils could not have been stored in such containers.

Mary had a small container of perfume for herself or her friends. As perfumes were rare, it was doubtless the most expensive thing she had in her possession and was the only appropriate thing she could bring to Jesus as an offering. Other people were entertaining him but as Mary had a bad reputation, she could not invite him to her house. Poor people and men and women of bad name hesitate to invite holy men into their homes. Instead they go to the homes of other people and there offer their gifts to the holy men.



JESUS UNDER SUSPICION

Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

Luke 7 : 39.

In the eyes of this Pharisee Jesus' tolerance of Mary was inexcusable. Jesus was a prophet and need not have been warned of the sinner. (When Saul inquired of the witch of Endor he disguised himself but she knew he was the king.) (I Sam. 28 : 12). The Pharisee was surprised to see Jesus permit the woman who was recognized as a sinner to touch him. It was also a shock to many other guests present.

Harlots are generally known in the east. Their eyes are blackened and they wear gay dresses. On the other hand, women are often misunderstood and misjudged. A woman may get a bad name and yet be the purest woman in the town. A casual remark to a stranger brands an eastern woman as a harlot. Our Lord looked into the

hearts of these women. He knew many of them were falsely accused and some of them had fallen and wanted to rise up again. He had come to help and save sinners, to heal the sick. It was hard for him to shun the company of such people who recognized him as a prophet and besought his help. He preferred to carry out his mission seeking the lost sheep than to adhere to the formalities of tradition so as to win the approval of the religious leaders.



WATER FOR THE FEET

And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head.

Luke 7 : 44.

The offer of water to a guest is a token of friendship and hearty welcome. In some houses the wives of the host or the servants wash the feet of honored guests. This is not done for ordinary guests or for honorable teachers and prophets whose doctrines are doubted.

Simon, a Jew, regarded Jesus as a Galilean and not as an orthodox Jew. He had heard he did not wash his hands when he ate. Therefore Simon did not receive Jesus with the special marks of honor and hospitality which an easterner bestows on an honored guest. Simon did not believe Jesus deserved such recognition so he received him as an ordinary guest and as a foreigner who was not entitled to the special treatment accorded to a Jewish prophet. Mary was, no doubt, in the house when Jesus was received and she noticed the attitude of Simon the Pharisee to Jesus the Galilean prophet. This is perhaps what prompted her to perform her immortal act. It was a rebuke to Simon but won her fame in the gospel of her Lord.



SEVEN DEVILS

And certain women, which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene, out of whom went seven devils. Luke 8 : 2.

The Aramaic word for demons is *shedy*, the cause of insanity and wrong thoughts. *Shedana*, demonic, is one whose mind is deranged. This term does not always imply the person suffers from violent insanity. It is also used of those who act queer or make mistakes, and sinners. *Shedana* or demonic is furthermore a general term commonly used in Oriental speech without any reference to insanity. Even wise men often call each other *shedana* with reference to any errors of judgment.

Seven is a numeral symbolical of completeness. Mary had seven devils in the curse and she was completely under the power of seven evil thoughts. Jesus did not cast seven particular devils out of her. One devil would have been sufficient to cause insanity if this statement is to be taken literally. This was not the case. Jesus restored her to her true self by converting her so that her wrong thoughts vanished forever. She was no longer subject to her earthly passions and desires which had weakened her faith in God.

When Mary saw Jesus and heard his sweet words she felt there was something wrong with herself. She was ashamed of her acts. She had always thought she could never make good again and now she heard a new prophet saying "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Mark 2 : 17) and that God would rejoice more over one repentant sinner than over ninety-nine righteous. Mary felt encouraged. These assurances made her repent and feel hopeful. Her attitude toward the world changed entirely and she began to lead a new life. She sought after the things which concerned her soul and sinful desires were eliminated. She was no longer dominated by wrong ideas, and practices.



IMMORTALITY

But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God. Luke 9 : 27.

Such statements are not to be taken literally. Easterners often say during conversations "If you do this thing you shall never die." Such statements are used as an expression of commendation concerning persons who have made some distinguished contribution to humanity.

Moses and Elijah had gone to heaven without tasting death. The Jews expected them to come back when the Messiah was to come. Jesus on the mount was talking about the coming of these two great prophets and the living work which they had done when they were on earth. These two prophets were the chief center of discussion among Jews. No one knew where they were and everyone talked about them. They were alive in the hearts of men and women who looked forward to their coming.

Jesus spoke of his disciples. They were also to live forever until the second coming. They were soon to become the chief topic of discussion among the races and peoples of the world. These disciples died physically but they have been living spiritually in the hearts of men and women who honor them. Jesus spoke of the spiritual life and the accomplishments which live forever. Physical life was of no account in his eyes. Flesh and bones are nothing. It is the spirit which makes life and causes the growth of the bones and flesh. The spirit lives forever because life is eternal. Matt. 16 : 28; Mark 9 : 1; John 8 : 52.



TRANSFIGURATION

And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistering.

Luke 9 : 29.

Just what happened on the summit of Mt. Tabor on that historic day is very difficult to determine. This is perhaps because the event was not reported until many years after the death of Jesus.

The Eastern version plainly states the transfiguration was a vision. Jesus and his disciples had climbed the mountain. They were sitting at the top resting. The summit of the mountain was encircled by a luminous cloud. Jesus and his disciples could see all the surrounding countries. Some of the disciples were thinking of Israel's former glory and the Messianic rule which was to restore the Davidic reign and establish God's kingdom on earth. Jesus had been talking about his journey to Jerusalem and his crucifixion. The disciples were interpreting events in their own way. They never imagined the Messiah was to suffer before the kingdom was established. They expected immediate restoration of the kingdom of Israel and looked for Jesus' journey to Jerusalem to suddenly establish this long predicted Messianic rule. They were, however, unable to explain the prophecies. The books of the Prophets stated Moses and Elijah were to return before the fulfillment of the Messianic rule. It was traditionally believed these two great prophets had not died but had ascended to heaven and were awaiting the coming of the Messiah and would appear first to prepare the way before him. The idea of a suffering Messiah was strange to these simple disciples who had taken events literally. They thought the Scriptures must first be fulfilled. Moses and Elijah must come back. Jesus, however, told them Elijah had already come but they did not know him. The disciples believed, no matter what happened, the kingdom would be established only through the fulfillment of the Scriptures. This necessitated the return of the two great prophets. Wearied by

the hard journey and discouraged with the sad news, they fell asleep. It was day time. While their bodies were resting, their minds were awake and still pondering on the difficult question. Peter saw Moses and Elijah in the company of Jesus and he spoke to Jesus asking him to make three tabernacles, one for him, one for Moses and one for Elijah. But when he opened his eyes, he found Jesus standing alone, encircled by a cloud. The two prophets who had appeared to him in the daylight vision seemed to have been enveloped in the cloud.

The transfiguration was a spiritual event. The law and the prophets were fulfilled in Jesus. Moses and Elijah had come. Their books had continually testified concerning Jesus and their words and commandments were committed to memory by the Jews. The transfiguration brought a sudden change in the lives of the disciples. The disciples now saw Jesus in a spiritual way. Jesus' face shone like a white garment. His characteristics were no longer like those of an earthly ruler. His picture resembled that of the suffering servant. Dreams of the earthly kingdom began to vanish from the minds of the disciples.



ENTERTAINING DIGNITARIES

And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for him.
Luke 9 : 52.

When a high government official or a religious dignitary contemplates a journey, one or two men are sent ahead to inform the people and make preparations. As hotels are unknown and it is difficult to procure food readily, it would be embarrassing for any one to invite such people to remain at his house at short notice.

Some townsfolk however refuse to give lodging to a large group of unmarried men, fearing that they might do damage. This is more true of a religious man whose teachings are questioned by the ecclesiastical authori-

ties. No one would be willing to risk his reputation by entertaining such a man and his followers because that would violate church laws. Even a casual conversation with such men is regarded as a sin.

Jesus was regarded as a heretic by the Jewish authorities. Any welcome given to him would offend the orthodox Jews. His face set towards Jerusalem meant that he was on his way to Jerusalem for the final conflict with the authorities. Any act of sympathy with him might endanger the town, because he was also accused of political treason by trying to make himself a King.



JESUS REFUSES TO CALL FIRE

And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?

Luke 9 : 54.

While Jesus and his disciples were on their journey to Jerusalem, they had to pass through Samaritan territory. Galilee was close to Samaria and travelers journeying from Galilee to Jerusalem had to stop over in Samaritan towns. Though easterners are hospitable and welcome strangers as guests, a little town may refuse to give shelter to a company of thirteen men because of fear or lack of accommodation. It would be difficult to provide food for such a large number. When easterners open their homes to strange travelers they have to show some hospitality. Also, in the case of Jesus and his disciples, there were religious differences in the way. The people of Samaria worshipped on Mount Gerizim and accepted the five books of Moses but followed the pattern of religion established by Jeroboam in the north. The people who dwelt north of Samaria on the borders of the Lake of Galilee accepted Jerusalem as the center of worship.

When Samaritans refused to welcome Jesus and his disciples to their town, the sons of Zebedee asked him

to call fire from heaven on them but Jesus refused. He said to them "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of." This is a literal translation from Aramaic, which means, "you do not know how bad tempered you are." The two brothers were hasty and impulsive. They came to be known as the sons of thunder because of their temper.



LOOKING BEHIND

And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.
Luke 9 : 62.

Some men, while ploughing, stop their oxen and turn backwards to see how much of the ground is already ploughed. This is done to determine how long it will take to complete the work. When they see the work is progressing slowly, they are discouraged. These men are known as lazy workers. They are anxious to finish the job, regardless of how it is done, so they may leave the field and go home. They are not interested in their work but merely in the wages.

When a man hires servants he secretly watches them plough to see if they look behind. If they do, he may discharge them immediately and hire others. Men who are known as good workers, never look behind when ploughing and harvesting because this is always a waste of time. They look forward and watch the uncultivated portion of the field rapidly decreasing in size. They are interested in the field and its products more than in leisure.

The disciples of Jesus were not to look behind and count the few converts. That would have discouraged them. The work of the Gospel might progress slowly but it was to be done thoroughly in order that the field might produce rich crops. Moreover the field was so large the work would continue forever.



LABOR SHORTAGE

Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.

Luke 10 : 2.

Economic and social conditions are different in the East from those in the United States and Europe. Most people work for themselves. A few are employed as servants. Unemployment is almost unknown and the shortage of laborers has always been a problem because few Eastern people like to work for others. Employment, as understood in the Occident, is not known in the East where any servant has practically the standing of a slave. Men of official position and the nobility, when reduced to poverty, would rather see their children starve than work for others.

During the harvest season, labor becomes very scarce. Most people have their own crops and first take care of them. Few people in the town can be hired. Some men raise more wheat than they consume. The surplus is used as a medium of exchange in bartering for other supplies such as clothes, implements and household articles. Servants and laborers are also paid in wheat. These are the men who are short of laborers during the harvest season. They must hire extra labor. At the outset, the owner of the field orders his servants to begin cutting the wheat. He would like to see them do it without hiring extra help and makes the excuse it is difficult to hire laborers. The servants soon find the task too great for them because, beside harvesting wheat, they have to perform their regular daily duties. Thus, the harvest becomes a problem. The servants fear they may be caught in the rainy season. They beg their master to hire laborers. When the master sees the servants cannot finish cutting wheat in due season, he rushes to hire men and goes to other towns and market places searching for idle laborers.

Jesus had twelve men to preach the Gospel. The field

was too great for them. His words were to reach the uttermost part of the earth and they were to be heard in every language. This was a great task for twelve men. Jesus told them to pray God to send more men into the field to preach. This need was met on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit recruited more laborers and sent them into the field. Mission work has continued for centuries. The harvest is still great although laborers are few. Matt. 9 : 27.



SALUTATIONS ON THE ROAD

*Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute
no man by the way.* Luke 10 : 4.

A salutation is a token of friendship. Easterners are sociable and generally salute each other in the home town and acquaintances on a journey. *Shalem* means salute and also surrender. To salute a stranger on the road exposes the solitary traveller to danger as some men take these greetings as a sign of fear and rob the unfortunate man. Arms are often concealed in the long robes and an unarmed man may be judged to be armed if his speech does not betray him. People generally travel in company and in caravans and they greet each other except people of rival faiths and different nationalities where hatred exists. They pass by silently, looking straight forward.

When friends salute one another, they often engage in conversation which frequently results in heated debate and possibly murder. Recall the case of Abner and Joab (2 Samuel 2 : 12ff). Jesus did not mean the disciples should not salute acquaintances and friends on the road but he did not want them to salute strangers and be exposed to danger. Today when an Assyrian meets a Kurd, he is not supposed to salute him but should pass him by without fear. Such advice and counsel is always

given to young people by parents and experienced friends.



EATING GENTILE FOOD

*And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you,
eat such things as are set before you.* Luke 10 : 8.

Antipathy to different religious beliefs has always been strong in Bible lands. Men of one faith never eat food prepared and served by members of a rival faith. Certain foods which are lawful to the adherents of one faith are an abomination to those of the other.

Easterners are usually hospitable to neighbors and strangers. In accepting hospitality, the person is expected to break bread with the family. To refuse to eat the host's bread is a breach of hospitality. There are some exceptions to this rule. Some men realize their foods are unlawful for guests who are of other faiths because they do not eat certain foods when they are guests at homes managed under a strange faith. These guests, in order to avoid embarrassment, offer excuses such as "I am fasting" or "I am sick."

At times, the refusal to eat bread at the home of a member of another religion is regarded as an insult to that faith. The situation becomes very complicated and embarrassing and ultimately results in debates on theology and traditions which lead to bitterness, quarrels, hatred and murder.

Some hosts forget to ask the faith of the guest they have welcomed. They hasten to kill sheep and prepare food and are surprised and disappointed to find the guest is a member of another faith which considers their bread and food unclean. Some hosts become angry and put out the guest. Others reluctantly let him lodge for the night. While the family is eating, the guest sits in a corner by himself to eat the bread and cheese he has carried in his bag or under his garments.

Today some Christians in the East never eat bread baked by Jews and a Jew would be considered defiled if he ate cheese made by Christians or Mohammedans. This is because the yeast which makes cheese is taken from a cow killed by a non-Jew.

Jesus' disciples were of Jewish faith. According to the traditions of the elders, they should not eat with Gentiles as we see in the case of Peter in Caesarea (Acts 10 : 14). Jesus knew these traditional customs caused needless disturbances and he knew continued observance of them would hamper the work of his disciples and retard the spread of the Gospel. If the disciples refused to eat the bread of other people, the disciples would also be looked on as unclean and would not be welcomed in Gentile homes and their glad tidings would mean nothing. This command was in line with Jesus' teaching "What enters into a man does not defile a man."



HEAL THE SICK

*And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them,
The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. Luke 10 : 9.*

Where western civilization has not yet penetrated the East, doctors, dentists, medicines and hospitals are unknown. Missionaries, consuls, travelers and strangers are often sought for healing. Foreigners are always looked upon as doctors. Native preachers and religious men also heal but most people have more faith in strangers and out-of-town individuals. Easterners care little about preaching. They are more impressed by what people do than by what they say. Religious men are thus expected to have extraordinary powers.

The disciples of Jesus had to heal the bodies of men as well as their souls. If they could not heal the sick men who were brought to them, how then could they preach to the people? They had to demonstrate the inner power of their religion by deeds as well as by words. "Words

without acts are like soft winds" is an old Eastern proverb.



I BEHELD SATAN FALLING

And he said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven.
Luke 10 : 18.

The word Satan is derived from the Aramaic word *sata* which means slide, miss the mark, go astray. "I saw Satan falling down" means Jesus saw light driving out darkness and his truth triumphant over the power of evil.

The seventy had just come back from a missionary tour. This was their first journey and their good news cheered Jesus. They had endeavored to see if Jesus' teaching would be accepted and if they, personally, could heal the sick. They returned full of joy because of their success. They had demonstrated their power, not only by healing the sick but restoring the insane, a type of sickness considered incurable. "Even devils have been subject to us in your name," means the people possessed with insanity were healed and converted through his name.



TREAD OVER THE SERPENTS

Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you.
Luke 10 : 19.

Religious men must possess some sort of unusual miraculous power to have the confidence of Eastern people. They are regarded as immune from the poison of snakes and scorpions because Eastern people would dispute the power of a healer if he was affected by the bite of a snake or insect. On one of his journeys, St. Paul was bitten by a scorpion when seated by the fire warm

ing himself. When the pagans saw he was unharmed, they at once recognized him to be a man of God endowed with special powers. (Acts 28 : 3-5.)

Easterners believe fear cures fever. Mohammedan dervishes carry snakes with them on their preaching tours. They tie them around their necks and carry them in their clothes. These dervishes claim to perform cures but they are sorcerers and magicians. When those sick with fever are shown snakes by these so-called healers, they get up from their sick beds and run away in fear. In some cases they are immediately cured.

The disciples of Jesus were given the power to overcome fear. There was nothing to retard their progress.



ORIENTAL MEDICINES

And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. Luke 10 : 34.

Where drugs, medicines and doctors are unknown, oil, wine and honey are considered as medicines. Other scarce articles are also sought as a remedy for the sick. Olive oil and butter are used to cure chapped hands and feet and other parts of the body. When a sore develops it is rubbed with oil. The use of oil is largely due to skin disorders caused by dirt and carelessness. Water is scarce and bathing is rare, and in some countries hardly known. One often sees men or women with chapped hands and feet with a layer of hard dirt on them. During the cold and hot seasons, the dirt breaks off leaving a deep hole in the skin. Oil softens the dirt and causes it to fall off and heals the skin underneath.

Some healers prescribe medicines that cannot be procured so that if the patient is not healed they cannot be blamed. Water from seven springs from which no one has drunk but virgin girls, soil from seven roads that do not cross each other and on which no one has travelled except virgin girls, are recommended as the best medi-

cines. If the patient is not healed, he feels that the soil and water are not what the healer prescribed.

On one occasion Jesus placed clay made of saliva on the eyes of a blind man. This was because he prescribed no medicines, and his words "Go, and thou shalt be healed" were so simple and easy that some of his patients insisted on medicines. They had seen other healers using herbs, sacred soil and prescribing complicated formulas. Jesus spat on the soil as a sign that he repudiated matter and not because clay would heal the eyes of the blind. This act proved to the blind man that matter was of no value and the act would cause the suppliant to wash his face.



ORIENTAL HOSPITALITY

And he said unto them, Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say unto him, Friend, lend me three loaves; Luke 11 : 5.

In the east no house has a blessing which does not entertain guests. The common proverb is: Today is my guest, tomorrow I will be his. Several extra loaves of bread are always baked for strangers. It often happens that travelers enter a house unexpectedly and bread has to be set before them. The owner of the house asks if they have eaten bread, and they reply, "Yes, we are not hungry" for it is the custom for an eastern guest to decline seven times but when he is pressed by the host, he sits down to the meal.

Bread is baked from day to day and often the family supply is exhausted before night. In case of unexpected visitors at night, bread is then borrowed from the neighbors for it would be embarrassing to the family to allow guests to depart without setting bread before them. This borrowing is done regardless of the hour of the night. Necessity forces the host to awaken his neighbor and ask him for the loan of three loaves.



A NIGHT VISITOR

And he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not: the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee. Luke 11 : 7.

In the homes of the peasantry and even of the middle classes one often finds two beds spread beside each other. One is used by the father and his sons, the other for the mother and daughters, and the little children. These two beds are surrounded by other beds on the same floor, occupied by the married sons or by other families.

When a stranger knocks at the door at night, the head of the family answers the call, because the identity of the stranger is unknown. On such occasions the children may be awakened, and it would be hard to put them to sleep again. Some men, therefore, excuse themselves by saying, "my children are with me in bed, and if I awake them they would cry." But most men would rise at such times because of the emergency. Such is it with our Heavenly Father who will not refuse us when we cry to him.



KNOCKING AND OPENING

And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. Luke 11 : 9.

Borrowing and lending, asking and giving are characteristic of eastern people who believe in doing favors for one another without expectation of return. "Cast your bread upon the water and you will find it again" is the saying in the orient which means we should be generous and merciful so that generosity and mercy will be extended to us. Bread and clothing are given to neighbors whether they are able to make return or not. Recall how the Egyptians loaned to the Israelites not only cloth-

ing, shoes and other articles but even their expensive jewelry; but these were not returned by the Hebrews. Money is loaned without a receipt and is returned with thanks to its owner when convenient to the borrower. Friends and strangers do not hesitate to go to a neighbor's house, knock at the door and ask for favors. These are generally granted if the seeker is worthy and the borrowing is for a good purpose, as to pay taxes or buy food supplies and other necessities. When a man's reputation is bad and he is known as extravagant, no one grants him a loan.

Not every one who knocks receives. There are many ways of knocking and different kinds of people who knock. Women in the house generally identify knocks. They can easily tell the difference between the knock of a traveler and the knock of a beggar. Travelers and guests knock with a stick or a stone at the door. Beggars tap on the ground near the door. The sound of knocking also indicates the urgency. In response to the tap of a beggar, the woman goes to the door with a piece of bread in her hand. The door is not opened to some beggars. Travelers, merchants and preachers are always welcome and their needs are met.

If selfish and deceptive neighbors do favors for each other, how much more will the heavenly Father grant the requests of those who earnestly knock at his door for their needs. Matt. 7 : 7.



EGG AND SCORPION

Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?
Luke 11 : 12.

The reference to egg and scorpion is made because in the East hen nests are made of straw and chickens are kept in the family house. Scorpions are often found in the straw. At night people are afraid to put their hands in the nests, lest they be bitten by scorpions. Then

again, during the summer months, while people are living in the mountains taking care of the sheep, scorpions crawl into tents looking for food and are frequently found in the bread and eggs.



STRONG MAN ARMED

When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace. Luke 11 : 21.

Nearly all oriental houses have court yards where sheep, oxen and cows are kept. In some towns, when a house is large, the animals are kept in the house in a room adjoining the family living room. When houses are small, not only animals but wheat and other valuable articles are kept outside in the courtyard. In this case, the owner of the house or a servant sleeps outside to watch the animals and goods.

In the east banks are unknown. Stealing is chiefly confined to animals and goods which are guarded day and night. When thieves attack the house, they first bind the owner and disarm him, then they take away the sheep. This is done in order to make a safe escape. It requires a long time to take the animals to a spot far away from the town. Matt. 12 : 29; Mark 3 : 27.



THE EVIL EYE

The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness.

Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. Luke 11 : 34, 35.

Bisha, the Aramaic word for evil, has several meanings. In this case, it means diseased; that is to say if your eye is diseased, your whole body will also be dark.

Bisha is likewise used to express envy and jealousy. Easterners often say "He is struck by an evil eye" which means somebody envies him. The faces of handsome children are blackened to protect them from men and women who are believed to have an evil eye. A woman never tells another that her baby is good looking. Such a remark would be considered as an evil eye.

The diseased eye also refers to one who is covetous and desires property which does not belong to him. In such a case, the term means all his actions are poisoned and the whole body is dark. A man without envy or covetousness is known as having a good eye which means a man of pure character whose words and actions bring blessing to others.

Bisha also means naughty. A mother calls a child who misbehaves *bisha*.

The term is further applied to things that are unnatural and deceptive. A walnut with a hard shell is called *bisha*. Matt. 6 : 22; Luke 11 : 34.



ALMS INSTEAD OF CEREMONY

But rather give alms of such things as ye have; and, behold, all things are clean unto you. Luke 11 : 41.

The Aramaic word *zedkata*, alms, is derived from the Aramaic word *zadak* to become righteous. An Easterner is judged not by what he says but by what he does, that is, by the amount of alms he gives and the hospitality he shows to the poor and strangers. Many people give about ten per cent of their income as tithes. Even robbers and bandits set aside a large share of their spoils as an offering to God so that they may be forgiven on the last day. Rich men who have acquired wealth unjustly give alms very generously while they are alive and gifts are offered at shrines in their names after their death.

This utterance was a rebuke to the Pharisees who

washed their hands before they ate and who prayed in the streets in order to appear righteous but who were not interested in showing mercy and kindness to the poor. The high priests and other religious leaders followed the traditions and received gifts but they did not practice giving. Matt. 6 : 1; Luke 12 : 33.



GRAVES

Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are as graves which appear not, and the men that walk over them are not aware of them. Luke 11 : 44.

In most Eastern countries cemeteries are not taken care of like those in America. Graves soon get covered with weeds and their identity is lost. The graves of prominent and distinguished holy men are, however, generally marked; a stone is placed over them and two smaller stones, one at each end. It is a sin for Orientals to walk over the grave of a holy man. When such graves become a center of worship, a small tomb is built over them; these are decorated with white plaster to be distinguished from other graves which are sunken.



THE TOMBS OF THE DEAD

Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them.

Truly ye bear witness that ye allow the deeds of your fathers: for they indeed killed them, and ye build their sepulchres. Luke 11 : 47, 48.

Tombs are built only over the graves of rich men and saints. Some of these tombs become places of prayer and worship. The admirers and followers of the dead visit them from time to time with offerings which are afterwards given to the poor and wayfarers. These tombs are always decorated with white plaster which is symbolical

of purity. Mohammedans generally place a jar of cold water in the tomb so that thirsty travelers may quench their thirst and offer a prayer for the departed saint. Eastern Christians, on the anniversary of the death of the saint, go to the grave in company, kill sheep and cook them and, with the bread brought from home, eat them in company with all who have come to the shrine. Matt. 23 : 29.



BARNS

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully:

And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?

And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.

Luke 12 : 18.

Easterners work for months ploughing and harvesting and then rest the remainder of the year. Family food and winter supplies, such as wheat, oil, olives and cereals are stored in a barn. Owing to difficulties in transportation, every town depends on its own supplies for the winter and every family raises food for its own use. There is little buying or selling.

In good years wheat and other supplies are stored in barns against the bad years. At times the crops continue good for several years and the barns are filled with wheat. The owner of the barn then builds an extension or erects a new and larger barn where the increased supplies are stored. When abundant wealth is accumulated, the owner ceases working and producing and begins to live lavishly, eating, drinking and entertaining.

Money is scarce in the East and wealth consists chiefly of products such as wheat, barley, beans and cereals. A man with many barns is thus regarded as wealthy and his position is envied. Owing to luxurious living and the comforts of life some of these men forget their God

and their religion. They scorn others who have not succeeded in producing wealth like themselves and are very happy when bad years come and their neighbors and friends are compelled to beg supplies from them. During conversations they often say "I don't care how long this condition continues in the country. I have everything stored for years. All I have to think of is to eat, drink and make merry." This happiness is not interrupted until a sudden illness or death takes place and the rich man is laid in his grave. If he leaves no son, his food supplies are divided among the people of the town.



THE LITTLE FLOCK

Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Luke 12 : 32.

A large flock is generally composed of several thousands of sheep belonging to many families. The sheep are taken care of by several shepherds. Others are assigned to protect them from bandits. In this way the flock is very secure. Most people, therefore, prefer to have their sheep in a large flock than in a small one. Small flocks generally consist of the sheep of poor families. They have only one shepherd and are usually victims of bandits. The owners are in constant fear of robbers.

The followers of Jesus were a little flock compared to the organized religion of Palestine with its high priests and scribes. They were hated and persecuted but they trusted in the Lord for protection against all enemies. Their Lord promised to be with them as a guarantee of their security, and promised they would be guided in all their activities by the Holy Spirit.



AWAITING THE MASTER'S RETURN

*Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning;
And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their
lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when
he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immec-
diately.* Luke 12 : 35, 36.

When a master of a house is visiting in the town or on a journey, his servants have to wait for his return and keep watch of the door. Easterners follow no itinerary and have no time-pieces so punctuality is not known. They have no formalities and time has no meaning to them. A man might be invited to dine at 6 o'clock at the house of his neighbor but the supper may not start until 10. While the master of the house is away, the women and children have their supper and after they have eaten, the servants are served. A portion of the food is kept for the master of the house until he returns. While the women and children are asleep, the servants must keep awake and be ready to serve their master when he gets back. Easterners have no regular hours for meals. They eat when they are hungry. At times a man may be invited to dine at a friend's house but when he returns he may be more hungry than when he left. Thus if the master of the house should find both women and servants asleep and no one to set food before him, he becomes enraged and in his anger he might discharge the servants and beat the women. It is a disgrace for the master of a house to wait on himself or to be locked out.

Some servants are very shrewd. They study their master's movements and calculate when he will probably return. If they think he will be late in returning they go to sleep, expecting to awake upon his return. Their calculations at times prove misleading and they sleep so soundly they do not awake when their master returns. To their surprise they are awakened with kicks. Faithful servants who love their master would never sleep. No matter at what hour their lord returned, they would be on the watch. At frequent intervals they go to the door

and look outside to see if he is coming. When he arrives they immediately rush to take off his shoes and to bring him water and set bread before him. Oriental masters are devoted to such servants. They tell them their secrets, their losses and gains, their happiness and sorrow. They share everything with them and when in difficulty seek their advice. Some masters would rather part with their sons than their faithful servants and there are servants who would give their lives for their lord.

This parable refers to the sudden coming of Jesus. Just as servants are unable to know when their lord will return so we are unable to tell the time and hour of his coming. We must therefore be alert and keep constant vigilance like the faithful servants who wait for their master's return. When Jesus comes, we will then be ready to greet him and be in his service with joy rather than be awakened from our sleep with disappointment and regret.



SET THE EARTH ON FIRE

*I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I,
if it be already kindled?* Luke 12 : 49.

To set the earth on fire" is an Eastern expression meaning to stir up and to disturb its peace. When taxes are high, Easterners say "The government is going to burn us."

Jesus' teaching was to upset the whole world but he found it already upset. The Eastern version reads, "I came to set the earth on fire; and I wish to do it, if it has not already been kindled." The Jews were divided into sects and bitter feeling existed between them. There was a great deal of discontent against the government and the ecclesiastical authorities who had betrayed the people for the sake of retaining their positions. There were rumors of wars, revolutions and uprisings. The teaching of Jesus was to help the fire which was already

kindled and to spread the flames abroad so as to upset the old order and bring in a better day for all mankind.



WEATHER FORECASTS AND POLITICS

And he said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is.

And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass.

Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time?

Luke 12 : 56.

Meteorological instruments are yet unknown in the East but from ancient times the weather has been forecast. The hot days in summer are predicted during the cold days in December and January. In the same way the cold days of winter are predicted in the hot summer months. The word for predicting is *bakhorey*. Forecasters are generally illiterate men and women who have made a study of weather conditions. They are found only in certain places. The method of calculating and forecasting is a secret which is handed down orally from one generation to another like the arts of healing and craftsmanship. Warnings about cold winters and hot summers are announced from month to month and precautions taken accordingly. The men and women who forecast weather conditions are called seers and fortune tellers. They also interpret dreams and predict periods of prosperity and peace, poverty and calamity. They are familiar with political situations and are consulted by the authorities. This was no doubt the power which Joseph possessed in Egypt.

Jesus upbraided the Jews for not trying to understand the political, social and religious situations of their times. He told them a change in the Jewish religion had to come if everlasting peace was to be obtained. The condition of the poor and oppressed must be bettered. To

accomplish this the Jews must share their religion with the pagan world. The hidden secrets of God's truth, revealed to the Jews, must be revealed to the Gentiles. The Jews failed to see the urgency of this. They knew how to forecast the weather but they did not know how to interpret the ways of God and escape impending calamities.



A FEAST—A FEUD—A RAID

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.
Luke 13 : 1.

This incident happened some time before Jesus began his ministry, probably in the early days of Pilate's administration. The Galilaeans mentioned in the reference were the followers of Judas of Galilee an insurgent leader (Acts 5:37) who tried to free his country from the Romans. This uprising is also mentioned by Josephus. After his death, some of his followers came to Jerusalem to the feast thinking the whole incident would be forgotten by the Roman officials. Pilate seems to have been informed of their presence in the city and so he had them captured and executed.

In Eastern countries a feast is the only occasion when the government hopes to capture bandits and insurgents. The officials know they will try to attend the feasts and so soldiers and secret service men are stationed. This special guard is also necessary to keep the peace because enemies attend these festivals and old feuds are avenged with bloodshed. (Acts 21 : 27)

"He mingled their blood with their sacrifices" means they were slain on the same day as the animals which they brought for the feast. Easterners often say to each other "I will mingle your goods with your blood" which means I will slay you for acquiring such goods unjustly.



JESUS ANSWERS WARNING

And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected.

Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem.

Luke 13 : 32, 33.

The Aramaic word *mishtamley* means to be through, to finish, and to complete. Jesus was asked to leave the town by those who knew Herod was planning to kill him. Jesus' reply, according to Eastern version, was "Go and tell that fox, Behold I cast out demons, and I heal to-day and to-morrow and on the third day I will be through." Fox, in Aramaic, means shrewd or deceptive just as it does in English. Jesus promised to leave after two days. He would then be through with his work.

Herod was under the impression John the Baptist had risen from the dead and was performing miracles. Moreover, Jesus was considered by many people as a disciple of John. He was baptized by the Baptist and in his early ministry, he followed in the footsteps of his predecessor. John was now dead and the Herodians considered Jesus as his successor. They were afraid he might instigate a rebellion to avenge the blood of John.

Jesus had important work to do before he could leave. There were many who had sought his help to be healed of their diseases. He had doubtless promised to visit certain people. Jesus was not willing to depart before completing his mission. The Eastern version more correctly states, "I must do my work to-day and to-morrow and I will leave the next day."



THE SABBATH

And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? Luke 14 : 5.

The Eastern version reads "If his son or his ox should fall into a pit," instead of "ass or an ox fallen into a pit." The Aramaic word for ass is *khmara*. The possessive case would be *khmareh*, meaning his ass. The Aramaic word for his ox would be *toreh*, and the Aramaic word for his son, *breh*. It seems very likely that the Greek translator mistook the word *breh*, his son, for *khmareh*, his ass. This error may have been caused by mutilation of the manuscript. Translators are aware of this difficulty when a part of the word cannot be read.

Jesus took as an example, a son and an ox, a human being and an animal. Some Jewish religious fanatics would not render a service for the sake of an animal on the Sabbath day. They would let it stay until the next day and if the animal died, it would not make any difference. To-day some Jews will not extinguish fire on the Sabbath even if it threatens to destroy their own home. If a man would not pull out his ox from a pit on a Sabbath day, he would certainly pull out his own son. The Sabbath was a most sacred Jewish institution and strictly observed by the Jews in Judea wherein the center of worship and priesthood was established. This was not the case in Galilee where the people were non-Jews by race. Here the Sabbath was not so strictly observed. Jesus was often criticized for healing and performing miracles on the Sabbath day.

If a father would lift his son from the pit on the Sabbath, how much more important it is to heal a sick man who is suffering pain in his bed on that day. In this way Jesus explained the importance of healing the sick and relieving suffering every day. Men are more important than the Sabbath because they are children of God. The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.



EXCUSES

*And they all with one consent began to make excuse.
The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground,
and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me ex-
cused.* Luke 14 : 18.

When a man buys a field he generally pays a deposit on it; and it is agreed that the purchaser should see the field during a specified time, and decide on the agreement. If he fails to do this, he either loses the deposit or he must pay the balance which is agreed upon. Under such circumstances Orientals do not blame a guest for breaking the engagement, to attend banquets and marriage feasts.

Oxen and horses are purchased on trial; the buyer is at liberty to return the animals if not suited to his purpose. The salesman and the purchaser must both be present when the animals are examined and tried out in the presence of witnesses.

In all Mohammedan countries when a man marries, he is exempt from the Army for a year and from other governmental duties which would take him away from his wife. For a year he must remain at home with his newly wedded wife, and if the next year he marries a second wife, he is exempt again. This custom is taken from the Jewish law which exempts men from war if they are engaged to wed. (Deut. 24 : 5.)



COMPEL THEM TO COME

And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. Luke 14 : 23.

The Eastern version more correctly reads "Urge them to come." The use of the word "compel" in the King James version is due to a misunderstanding of a beautiful Oriental custom where the host urges his guest not only

to attend the festival but also to partake of the meal. At first invitation is invariably declined as a matter of courtesy but when pressed it is accepted because the guest is then convinced of the host's sincerity. In many instances guests decline to eat until urged to do so no less than seven times. This distinguishes the real guest from the beggar and the poor who grasp at the first invitation and rush to the banquet house.

The Aramaic word *alesso* means urge and insist. An Oriental host almost begs his guests to attend saying, "You must come to my house. By the head of my son I would not eat if you are not present. My house is your house. I am your servant." Such urgency is due to the fact that no banquet is a success unless the house is crowded and there is a waiting line of guests outside. Such a full attendance advertises the popularity of the host. In some parts of the East the guests are also given presents after the banquet. In Kurdistan and Assyria some guests would be insulted if they were not offered presents.

The parable refers to some guests who had declined for certain reasons but the host was determined at any cost to have a full house and avoid embarrassment. The reference is to the Kingdom of heaven. The Jews were the invited guests but they refused to come and their places were then given to the Gentiles. Men would come from all corners of the earth but the children of the Kingdom would be kept out. Matt. 22 : 9.



HUNDRED SHEEP

What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?

Luke 15 : 4.

Hundred is considered a high figure in the East. It is the highest figure that most men and women can count and understand. As sheep raising people are gen-

erally simple and illiterate, figures over one hundred can only be understood by a few.

Most Easterners either have one hundred sheep or strive to get that number. A man with a hundred sheep is considered well to do and content. The rich are exceptional, as some of these men own several thousand sheep and goats but their number is reckoned by hundreds.

The desire to have a hundred sheep is so strong that no one would like to see the number of his sheep fall below that figure. Therefore, when a man who has one hundred sheep loses one of them, he is more concerned over it than the man who had only seventy-five and lost even five. This is because no family wants to see the number of their sheep fall below the coveted figure.

Our Lord used this figure because it was well known among the people. Just as the owner of the lost sheep was anxious to find it, so our heavenly Father is happier to see one sinner repent than ninety-nine righteous men. Matt. 18 : 12.



THE LOST COIN

Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it?

And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Luke 15 : 8-9.

In an Oriental house five or six families live under the same roof, each occupying a part of the square building. As family ties are very sacred and people are clan-nish one often may see a father, his married sons and their uncles and families living together. It is also common for families not related to each other by blood ties to live together. The women of these families and their neighbors visit each other with freedom, work and gossip together.

Women generally admire one another's garments and

ornaments. One of the first things to attract their attention is the necklace which is often made up of coins which the woman herself has earned, or it may be an heirloom and regarded as a valuable and sacred treasure. In the East, toys are unknown and children often play with their mother's necklaces and at times break them so that the coins are lost.

When a woman loses any coins all the women in the house become embarrassed because they are apt to be suspected. The house is then carefully swept, a candle is lighted and a close search is made around all the corners and in the dark places. If the coin is not found the women visitors leave with regrets, and in a few hours the news spreads through the village that a coin is lost and that it may have been stolen. Some of these visitors then wish they had not come to the house on that day. But if the coin is found its owner goes from house to house informing her neighbors of her joy and removing every thought of suspicion, saying with gratitude, "I have found my lost coin and I knew that no one had stolen it but that it was in my house." The women neighbors then rejoice.



PRODIGAL SON

And he said, A certain man had two sons:

And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living.

Luke 15 : 11-13.

The interest of an Eastern family is always centered around the first-born son. The other children are almost disregarded. The father is deeply devoted to his first-born who is the heir of the family and his successor after his death. The discrimination between the sons is so

great that it causes jealousy and disputes, and strains the family relations.

The first-born, even in his early youth, is empowered by his father to act in his absence and to take care of the family. He has the power to buy and sell, receive guests, look after servants and pay them wages, hire and discharge laborers, and even punish his mother, brothers and sisters as he sees fit. He becomes the master of the house. If it happens that he is young and lacks understanding, he often misuses his powers.

From early childhood, rivalry and hatred exist between the elder and the younger, largely due to the fact that the younger brother is ignored by the family. The best garments are made for the first-born and a larger and more delicious portion of food is given him. The younger brother is never consulted and even when he gives good advice, his counsel is ignored.

While fathers invariably take sides with the elder son, the mother is more friendly toward the younger. But she has nothing to say in the household affairs when money and property are concerned. Her task is solely one of reconciliation. She tries to make peace between her sons but, when she fails, the younger son secures his property and leaves his home. He either goes to the house of a friend or to another town where he would be away from the brother whom he hates. Rebecca advised Jacob to leave his father's house and go to Assyria, to the house of his uncle, because his brother Esau hated him. Jacob despised Esau because he was the first-born and his father's favorite son. (Genesis 27:41).

In the East, family property consists of sheep, food supplies, a little cash, and lands. This property does not belong to the father as in America, but to all male members who have an equal share in it. A son of twelve years of age, in the East, is often married, and after marriage, he generally lives with his father's family. If he decides to leave his father's house, he takes with him his share of the entire property. If unmarried he does the same. To leave the father and go away is a common thing in the East; this is about the only way a younger son can

change the attitude of his father toward him. When he was at home his father disregarded him, but after he leaves, thoughts and worries about him invade his father's mind. He begins to blame his first-born and gradually feels affection for the younger boy. He sends servants out to search and inquires of travelers in the town whether they have heard of him. If he returns, even though he has misused his fortune, the father receives him and makes a feast of thanksgiving for him. A banquet is needed not only because the father is happy over his son's return, but because townspeople gather all day at the house to see the son who was lost and is found.

Such also is the joy of our Heavenly Father and of the angels in Heaven, when a sinner who has spent his life in luxuries and evil, returns from the error of his ways and begins a new life.



HUSKS OR PODS

And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

Luke 15 : 16.

The Aramaic word for husks is *kharobey*, which is derived from *khorba*, a lonely place. The *kharobey* plant grows wild in the open country of Syria and is commonly edible. Its husks or pods are sweet and used for food by some people. Travelers and the poor eat many wild vegetable plants which are also eaten by animals. During catastrophes, droughts and famines, when wheat is scarce, the people subsist on wild fruits and plants.

Vegetables are seldom used. Bread, cheese, honey and curds are the chief foods. Occasionally a few wild vegetables are eaten raw or cooked in the homes of the poor. It would be a disgrace for the rich and the nobility to eat vegetables, which are the food of the poor. Their food generally consists of honey, raisins, molasses and other

sweet things. A few years before the war, tomatoes and turnips were considered an abomination by some people. Rich people would not touch them and looked down on those who used them. There is no more offending remark than for one to say to his friend, "Eat turnips."

Jesus in this parable compares the life of the prodigal son in his own home where he lived in luxury to the life he lived while feeding the swine. Other shepherds were eating husks or pods and to them it was the usual thing, but to the prodigal son such food was an abomination because he thereby lowered himself to the standards of the poor.



THE PRODIGAL'S MOTHER

But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry. St. Luke 15 : 22, 23.

In countries where the rights of woman are not recognized whatever she does for a member of the family is credited to the father. What a mother says and does in relation to her sons does not count. An Eastern family is generally divided. The father looks after the sons and the mother, the daughters. A mother has more to say about her daughters but has no authority over her sons. Even during meals the father and his sons eat together and the female members of the family eat afterwards.

The mother of the prodigal son rejoiced more than his father did. She was the one who had been enquiring of all wayfarers about him. She embraced him with tears in her eyes and prepared the calf and baked the bread for the banquet his father was giving to welcome him home. On such occasions mothers are overcome with joy. They hasten to make preparations for the reception. It is the father who sits at the banquet and entertains the

guests and receives praise and credit for his generosity. The mother is busy with the servants but she is the main inspiration of the entire festival although she remains in the background, as is the Oriental custom.

The gospel makes no mention of the mother because whatever is done in a family is done in the name of the father, and in his absence the elder son takes his place.



BUTTER NOT OIL

And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty.
Luke 16 : 6.

The Aramaic word for oil is *mishkha* which means butter. In many Eastern lands where money is scarce and ancient methods of trading continue, butter is used as one medium of exchange by the government as well as by the people at large. Taxes are collected in butter, Church tithes are paid in the same way, and loans transacted with this article. The price of animals, dry goods and food stuffs is often quoted in terms of butter. It is stored in sheep skins and carried by merchants from place to place for this purpose.

In this instance the steward had loaned a hundred measures of butter to some borrowers who had probably used it to purchase articles, or pay taxes or debts. The business of making loans and collecting debts is left in the hands of the chief steward who uses his discretion in making settlements. Most of these transactions are conducted orally and written agreements are seldom made. Even in the latter case the name of the debtor is entered on the books merely as a matter of record and in neither case is a signature attached.

Aramaic numerals could easily be changed without rousing suspicion. This practice is still prevalent and causes no end of trickery and confusion. Many servants take undue advantage of their master's confidence in

this matter so as to secure favors from debtors or exact more than is due.



THE UNJUST STEWARD

And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.

Luke 16 : 8.

Stewards in Bible lands hold a different position in the house of their lord to the stewards and servants in Europe and America. The task of an Eastern steward is rather a peculiar one. He is neither a servant nor a partner, and yet he exercises great authority over the affairs of the household. He is not only in charge of the servants and the hired workers but he also looks after the women, and the children of his lord; and is empowered to transact business as he sees fit.

Stewards are generally unmarried men or widowers, with an education and business training seldom possessed by their rich masters. Some of them receive their position by pledging their services and loyalty to their master without pay. In other words, they become adopted members of the family. An Oriental steward may rebuke his master's wife, and punish his sons and daughters if he sees fit in the absence of his master.

Since these stewards receive no remuneration for their faithful services they have more power and much to say. They act as if the house were their own. They give their master's money to their own relatives and friends without the least thought of dishonesty. They also cancel the debts of those to whom they have loaned money and who are unable to pay.

The hired servants are invariably jealous of a faithful steward, and constantly conspire and protest against him. They spy on him and often report to their lord that his steward is spending his wealth lavishly, lending money to people whose reputation is bad and from whom

debts cannot be collected. The servants also gossip about the steward and accuse him of being in love with certain women to whose relatives he has made loans. At first the master of the house disregards this gossip and complaints, and tries to make peace between the servants and steward, but when complaints and accusations continue coming to him, he is forced to take action and strengthen the affairs of the house. He immediately begins an investigation by calling the servants to state the charges and give the names of the people to whom the steward has loaned money and given oil and wheat. He then summons the steward and, after heated arguments, questions his actions and generosity, and charges him with embezzlement of his property. The steward denies the charges and states that those to whom he had loaned money were worthy, and the families he had helped were poor.

When he sees that his master is angry and that he is in danger of losing his position, he calls on the people to whom he had given loans, stating his case to them and telling them that the servants have aroused the anger of his master and made serious charges of embezzlement against him. He reminds them of these loans and favors in the hope that when he is put out of his master's house he may be welcome at their homes. He secretly reduces the sums loaned, and where his master does not know the sum loaned the entire amount is often cancelled. He does this with a sense of justification because he has spent years of faithful service without any pay, and when he leaves he knows that his lord will not compensate him.

Our Lord commended the wise steward because there was no embezzlement and dishonesty in his work. He had given some money to his friends, reduced the loans of those who were unable to pay and done some charity with the wealth of his lord, but a part of this wealth was his because he had helped to make it and he was entitled at least to a share of it.



THE MAMMON OF THIS WORLD

And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. Luke 16 : 9.

In the Occident, friendships generally result from mere acquaintances in churches, clubs, and social and business intercourse. In Eastern lands it is not an easy thing for one to make friends with influential people, as friendship is literally bought with money, favors and loans.

Peasants and common people are always eager to gain the friendship of higher classes, publicans and government officials. The latter always expect to receive something for this favor of their friendship because in the East, men always need the protection of influential individuals.

Such friendships are usually procured by means of bribery, gifts or lavish banquets. When a person desires to get close to a certain official, he generally kills sheep, buys wine and invites as many guests as possible in honor of the guest who is a prospective friend. After the banquet, the honored guest is also presented with a sum of money, a horse or a beautiful garment. It would be an insult to invite such men without being able to give them appropriate gifts. Government officials prefer cash.

My cousin who was mayor often invited government officials and influential men to our house. We killed sheep and made a banquet, and after the meal, he gave them garments or money as presents. The recipient values these gifts and always remembers the act of generosity and hospitality extended to him, and when his friend needs his influence, he does everything in his behalf. In countries where bribery and corruption predominate, and where an unjust system of taxation prevails, friendship with men who are in power is very essential.

The unjust steward who was called upon to account for his work hastened to his master's debtors and reduced their debts so as to gain their friendship in return for these favors in case he may lose his position.

Jesus counsels us to make friends with the wealthy of this world not by acts of bribery but by generosity, by reducing debts, extending credits, helping officials in their need. He would have us do to others what we would have them do to us in like situations.



THE PERMANENCY OF THE LAW

And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. Luke 16 : 17.

The contrast is made in this verse between the probable passing away of heaven and earth and the positive permanency of the law. This style of comparison and contrast is still common in northern Aramaic speech. People say, "the river may dry up but not the tears in my eyes." Others say, "I was so thirsty that I could dry up the sea." These statements suggest the depth of grief and the intensity of thirst and are not to be taken literally. The Aramaic word *nebran* could be translated, will pass or may pass. The emphasis in the verse is on the law as an eternal instrument.

Jesus was suspected by the Jews of weakening their religious laws, and he here answered those who falsely accused him. He declared that the law could neither be weakened nor abolished, because it is eternal and comes from God, and what is of God is indestructible and eternal. Matt. 5 : 17.



THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS

*There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:
And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores.* Luke 16 : 19, 20.

The gates of rich men are always crowded with beggars, sick people and dogs, expecting to receive food left over from the rich man's table. Some rich men see that they are fed, others leave such matters to their serv-

ants. The master sees them but he seldom talks with them.

Rich men are always criticized and attacked by religious teachers who either rise from poverty or whose followers are poor. No matter how a man acquires his wealth he is suspected and exposed to attacks. This parable might suggest that Jesus advocated communism and was opposed to rich capitalists. This is a mistaken view. He was certainly opposed to those who acquire their wealth unjustly but he did not imply that any one should literally divest himself of his possessions and give everything to the poor and become destitute. Such a course would have created yet another evil. It would have simply made the poor rich and the rich poor, and the problem of poverty and riches would not have been solved. This parable was either devised by Jesus or was a popular one in use. Verbal illustrations are common in oriental speech. Religious men, in order to pacify them, and minimize their suffering, picture the poor in heaven with abundance and the rich in hell fire suffering for their greed.

In his teaching Jesus referred to wealth and condemned only those who relied on it for their eternal salvation. He did not compel those who followed him to renounce all their wealth. For instance, Zacchaeus gave away only half of his wealth and the other half he kept for himself and his family. Other disciples had nothing to leave. The old nets and boats which they left behind could not be sold. Perhaps they left them to some of their relatives. The parable of the rich man who enlarged his barns and stored wheat and other food supplies clearly explains that Jesus was against those who were selfish and not against rich men who were entrusted with wealth and used it generously. (Luke 12 : 16).

There is no recognized middle class in the East. The people are either extremely poor or rich. This parable is intended to illustrate the gulf between the rich and the poor, and the eternal judgment and punishment meted out to the wicked rich and the blessings of salvation enjoyed by the pious poor whose property is confiscated

by injustice and heavy taxation. A drop of water which the rich man asked is symbolical of his yearning for relief from suffering. This whole picture is allegorical.



THE DONKEY'S MILL

It was better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.

Luke 17 : 2.

In Aramaic speech a millstone is known as a donkey's mill. It is a large round and smoothly hewn stone six feet in diameter and about a foot thick laid on the ground, on which another stone of the same size is placed. A hole is bored in the middle of each stone and an axle is fastened through them. The donkey is then harnessed at one end of the axle to turn the mill and grind wheat, and it is driven by a boy or man. Some of these mills are also used as oil presses, and in such cases, the upper stone is placed on its edge upon the lower stone.

Such mills are still in use in many cities and villages. They are also found at the ruins of the ancient cities. These two pieces of stone are the largest to be seen in any town. During conversations whenever people speak of a heavy object they generally mention the donkey's mill because everyone knows its size and weight. Jesus referred to it because it was a stone familiar to everybody and the lesson he wanted to convey could readily be understood. Matt. 18 : 6.



IDLE SERVANTS

So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do.

Luke 17 : 10.

The Aramaic word *batiley* means idle and not unprofitable, and it gives a correct picture of relations between masters and servants in the Orient. In America

and Europe laborers and servants work by hours. Even though they are required to be on duty they are given certain hours for rest, and when their work is done they are free to go home. This is not so in the East where servants are hired to work throughout the year and be at their task every hour, ready whenever their lord may want them. They are assigned to perform various duties, both at home and in the field, and they must not remain idle. Even if there is nothing to be done, they must make themselves busy, especially when their masters are present.

Eastern servants never complain of their hard labors and long hours. Instead, they always tell their lord that there isn't enough work to be done and that they are idle. If they say otherwise they would be branded as lazy and no one would hire them. When a servant tells his master that he is idle for lack of work, his lord trusts him more and gives him privileges. But those servants who complain are assigned to harder tasks and are liable to be discharged.



THE GODLESS JUDGE

*There was in a city a judge, which feared not God,
neither regarded man:*

*And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto
him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. Luke 18 : 2, 3.*

Judges in Eastern countries are always misjudged and regarded as cruel and dishonest. Even though the judge holds a high position, he is generally regarded as a publican and sinner. In spite of what he gives in alms and however devoted a churchman he may be, he is suspected of injustice.

Oriental judges are always reluctant to take cases brought by widows and poor people. They complain that they are not well or are too busy. Many of them make false promises and excuses. "Come some other time. I'll see that justice is done you." On the other hand, the

widows and the poor insist on repeated visits to the judge because they know that the only way to get a hearing is to keep calling at his house.

Even to-day in many Eastern lands judges are not paid for their services and have to depend for their living on bribes. The people are aware of this fact and so they send the bribe a few days ahead of their visit. Thus, when a man calls at the judge's house without having sent a bribe, it indicates that he is poor. He is answered by a servant who tells him the judge is busy and cannot be seen. Most judges feel it would be a loss and a waste of time to accept poor widows' cases unless they are forced to do so.

Jesus compares the heavenly Father with the wicked judge and points out that if such a man finally gives a hearing, the gracious God is more ready to answer the calls of those who earnestly seek him.



THE SON OF DAVID

And he cried, saying, Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me. Luke 18 : 38.

Easterners customarily call their great men by the names of their distinguished heroes and beloved kings, with no thought of family connection. Some of these famous men may have lived a thousand years before, just as David was a thousand years before Jesus. The Aramaic word *bar*, son, is also used to signify likeness of character. In this case, *Bar David* means like David and not an actual son of David.

David was the best loved king of Israel. He was not only the liberator of the Israelites from the Philistine yoke, but also the founder of a kingdom which made Israel known among other nations. The Messiah was expected to be like David. He was to free the Jews from the Roman yoke and establish the lost throne of David.

Jesus never pretended that he had any connection with

the royal family of David, but he reluctantly accepted this title which was given him by the people as a mark of distinction and honor. This title, "son of David," annoyed the Pharisees who believed that such an honor was appropriate only for the Messiah who was to be born in Judaea and a descendant of David. (John 7:42). The Jews understood the Scriptures literally and could not associate Jesus, the Galilean, with the house of David. God's promises to David were spiritual. Matt. 20 : 30; Luke 10 : 47.



TO RECEIVE A KINGDOM

He said therefore, A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.

Luke 19 : 12.

To receive a kingdom means to be confirmed as a ruler. The Romans were the rulers of Palestine and Syria, as well as of the countries around the Mediterranean basin. They appointed natives to rule over small territories, largely inhabited by tribal people. There were also Roman viceroys and governor-generals who acted as supervisors in various parts of the Eastern empire. The native rulers were not kings but tetrarchs who ruled in the name of Caesar. When their people were discontented they were recalled by the governor-general or by Rome, and other men appointed in their place.

Where the ancient civilization still predominates, the ruler of a town of two hundred families is still called king, in Aramaic *malick*. The Aramaic word for king is *malika*, which means ruler or counsellor. (Isaiah 9:6). *Malick* is used for a chieftain of a small territory or a mayor of several districts.

These positions were procured largely by means of bribery or political intrigue. When high officials were recalled or the emperor died, these positions were insecure and depended largely on favors received from the new ruler. They could be obtained only by a special trip

to the capital city of Rome or to the seat of the provincial government. This is how Herod and his sons obtained their kingdoms. This is the practice to which Jesus makes reference in the parable.



SERVANTS ENTRUSTED WITH MONEY

And he called his ten servants, and delivered them ten pounds, and said unto them, Occupy till I come.

Luke 19 : 13.

Noblemen and rulers of small states generally receive no salaries. Their people are poor and burdened with heavy taxes and tithes imposed by their own rulers and with tributes to the central government. The noblemen and rulers of cities prosper by trading. They entrust their servants with money to be used for commercial purposes. It is loaned to merchants and traders with interest and used to buy and sell sheep and wheat. Sheep are bought from small herdsmen in country places and sold in large cities for food. Large profits are derived from these transactions. The business of buying and selling sheep continues during the summer months so that the money is turned over many times and the original capital invested is multiplied. Then again money is loaned to farmers to buy seed. During the harvest season farmers give one fifth of the total wheat raised to money lenders.

In the east rulers, noblemen and officials of high rank entrust their entire business to their servants. It would be a disgrace for these men to buy and sell and perform such menial duties. These tasks are for servants and stewards, who at a certain time during the year give account to their lord of all their transactions, including profits and losses. Most of these men of title and rank take no chances on losses. If their servants happen to lose through carelessness or otherwise the money entrusted to them, they are held responsible. The property of those who fail is confiscated and they are discharged. Some servants hesitate to use the money entrusted to

them and hide it in their homes and return it at the end of the year.

This nobleman was a ruler of a city. He went on a journey to pay his respects to the king and to seek confirmation of his official position. He entrusted his servants with small coins called in Aramaic *menin*. On his return he rewarded his servants who had traded and made large profits with *kakrey*, the largest coins in those days, probably equivalent to 3000 shekels apiece. *Kakra* talent was a large coin of silver or gold. A man could carry only one of them. The Greek translators made an error when they translated this word *kakra* for *karkha*, province. The difference between these two words is noted with a single dot placed over one of the characters and can be

easily confused. *Kakra* כדכא *karkha* כדכח. This nobleman could not have given his servants ten and five cities as a reward for their faithfulness for he, himself, had only one city, nor were his servants qualified to be rulers. Because of their business fidelity they were entrusted with larger sums in view of larger profits in the future. This is characteristic of the East where only small sums are loaned at first until a servant's honesty and ability are demonstrated. Matt. 25 : 14-30.



HUSBANDMEN AND THE VINEYARD

Then began he to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time.

And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty.

Luke 20 : 9, 10.

Rich, Oriental landlords plant vineyards, build towers and erect wine presses, and then lease them to others. In some cases the leasee agrees to take care of the vineyard, prune and cultivate it and give one-third of the fruit to its owner. Other vineyard workers lease

vineyards for a lump sum of money to be paid, according to the terms of the agreement. Generally, vineyards are leased for a number of years, and the workers pay during the season, either in cash or in fruit.

The leasing of a vineyard is not always profitable. Droughts and unseasonable rains often cause heavy losses, and the workers have to pay whether the vineyard produces or not. They must meet the terms of the agreement at any cost; otherwise they will lose their reputation as vineyard leasers. For when their contract expires, no man would be willing to rent them another vineyard, or trust them with anything.

Some vineyard owners, even though they have leased their vineyards, expect fruits from them free of charge. Workers who desire to retain the good will of the owners during the season send baskets of grapes and other fruits to them, especially fruits of the trees which the owner of the vineyard had planted with his own hands. When they fail to do this, the owner does not hesitate to send his servants to the vineyard to pick as much fruit as they wish without the permission of the leasees, because he feels the vineyard belongs to him and he has a right to its products. Some leasees who are humble and generous men raise no objection but others resent such interference.

During bad years, vineyard leasees are very careful and try to make all sacrifices possible in order to meet their obligations, and would not allow even their own children to pick grapes. In such hard times there is nothing that will arouse their hatred against the owner of the vineyard more than to see the owner's servants walking in the vineyard, eating and filling baskets with grapes to take away. The workers hate the owner who compels them to pay the last cent, even though he knows the vineyard has not produced sufficient fruit that year, and still wants to get grapes without paying for them. Then again soldiers and government officials also take whatever they please and this adds to the annoyance of the husbandmen.

Some of them, because of worry, lose their temper and

beat the servants of the vineyard owner. They would be glad to see the owner take the vineyard away from them, rather than pay the rent which they have not earned. The servants of the owner of the vineyard, however, feel that it belongs to them and they have the right to pick the grapes, even though the vineyard was leased. Some of the servants choose to fight rather than return with the empty baskets in humiliation. During such quarrels servants as well as vineyard workers are wounded and killed.

The vineyard was the symbol of the Jewish religion and people. It was entrusted by God to the priests and elders, but they had not been faithful workers. They had not taken good care of it and had not offered fruits in due season to its owner nor had they paid the rent. Their rule was one of injustice and extortion. They were wicked and greedy workers who had completely forgotten the rights of the owner.

God sent his prophets to warn the Jewish priests and leaders of this sacred trust, but they stoned and killed them. Then, thinking they would be ashamed before his Son, he sent him. But they took him outside the vineyard and slew him, to take possession of the vineyard. Finally, the Lord demanded vengeance and sent a foreign army to invade and destroy Jerusalem, and to kill the high priests and elders who were the unfaithful vineyard workers. God transferred His trust from the Jews to the Galileans and Gentiles. Matt. 21 : 35; Mark 12 : 1.



THE TRAITOR

But, behold, the hand of him that betrayeth me is with me on the table. Luke 22 : 21.

In the east the worst breach of friendship is for one to eat another's bread and secretly betray him. To eat bread together is a token of loyalty, love and devotion. This sacred trust is seldom betrayed by an Oriental. It is well illustrated in an eastern saying, "He is eating my

bread and is disgracing my table." "His hand on the table" is an Aramaic colloquialism, which means, "he is eating my bread and yet he is plotting against me."

All the disciples were eating and with their hands they were picking food from the tray. In the East knives and forks are unknown. Jesus knew that Judas was plotting secretly against him. None of the disciples had suspected Judas' treacherous act, nor did they understand about whom Jesus made the remark. Each one of them applied it to himself. This was because all of them were eating bread at the same time. Hence the question put by each one, "Is it I?"



DESTINED TO DIE

*And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined:
but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!*

Luke 22 : 22.

The Son of man was destined to die. The Scriptures had predicted the manner of his death, and under no circumstances would Jesus reverse the course of the prophecies about the suffering servant. Indeed there was no other way to ultimate victory except by the Cross. Jesus did not want his disciples to be sorrowful on account of his departure or of the way he was to die by crucifixion. He impressed them that this was God's plan and that his death on the Cross was his destiny. What was written about him had to be fulfilled.



THE KINGS OF THE GENTILES

And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

Luke 22 : 25.

In countries where autocracy is the only form of government kings and rulers exercise a tremendous power over their subjects. Their people are regarded merely as

property, and their services could be exchanged or sold. Their possessions could be confiscated at any time their ruler desired it or they could even be killed at their behest, as in the case of Naboth. (I Kings 21 : 13).

The officials of these rulers and kings are empowered to levy taxes and collect revenues from their subjects. On the other hand, during hard times they act as benefactors by distributing wheat and other supplies to their subjects. It is a characteristic of Eastern rulers and of rich men who acquire wealth unjustly to distribute it generously in times of depression. Some of these men would even share their supplies of bread with their famine-stricken people.

Jesus condemned this type of false generosity because these rulers were distributing in charity what they had confiscated from these same people by force and violence. They were benefactors only in name. And yet they were so called by their unfortunate subjects in order to make it easier to get back what was unjustly collected from them.

The disciples of Christ were to avoid all forms of injustice and act like brothers towards each other. The chief among them was to be their servant. They were to teach meekness, love and kindness and be patterns of these virtues themselves.



THE APPOINTMENT OF JESUS

And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; Luke 22 : 29.

This is an Aramaic colloquialism. People often say to each other "God gives you the kingdom of heaven," which means, God gives you tranquillity and peace, and not, God will make you a king or ruler.

The disciples were expecting to be rulers of a kingdom on earth because the Messiah according to the Jews was to be the King of Kings, and Jesus' prediction of his death shattered all their dreams of earthly peace and pros-

perity. Disappointment took possession of their hearts. Jesus tried to cheer them by promising them everlasting peace and happiness in the kingdom of God, where they were to sit on his right and on his left, and judge the twelve tribes of Israel.



THE DISCIPLES TESTED

And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat:

Luke 22 : 31.

The Eastern text reads "Sift all of you." In Aramaic the second person is different in the singular and plural. The reference here is not only to Peter but to all the disciples who were to be sifted like wheat. "Sifted like wheat" means tested.

Wheat is sifted so as to separate the tares and the soil from the wheat. In this process of purification, it is constantly shaken in the sifter until the tares appear on top, the soil falls below and the wheat is at the bottom.

The disciples were to be sifted. Their ranks had already been weakened and their faith was to be tried out. Judas was to be separated from them, Peter was to deny him, and most of the other disciples were to flee. They were to be shaken out by the force of the temptation, which was to overtake them unexpectedly in the dark hours of the night.



SWORDS

Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one.

Luke 22 : 36.

In Eastern lands, during revolutions and wars, people sell their valuables and buy arms. At such times, when wealth is endangered, swords and other arms are popular

and valuable. It would not be embarrassing for a man to exchange his coat or even his trousers for a dagger or sword and return home clad only in his inner shirt. Such forms of barter are very common in marketplaces and streets even to-day.

This is a proverbial saying concerning an alarming situation. Jesus did not literally mean that his disciples were to sell their cloaks and buy swords. This would have been a departure from his Messianic interpretation of the suffering servant, and it would have been accepted as a signal for a revolution to establish the kingdom of Israel by force. What Jesus really meant was that danger was approaching and that he would soon be betrayed into the hands of the priests and be crucified. The disciples were never armed and had nothing to sell to buy arms. They, however, took this saying literally and replied saying, "We have two swords." Jesus said "This is enough." He dismissed the question because he knew they were taking things literally. Had he wanted them to be armed and to fight for him, more swords would certainly have been acquired.



PRAYING ALONE

*And he was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast,
and kneeled down, and prayed,* Luke 22 : 41.

How the disciples recorded these sad moments has been a puzzle to a great many Bible students. When Jesus arrived at Gethsemane, the disciples sat down and he separated from them a little distance, probably because he did not wish to alarm them by what he might say in his prayer. Jesus knew Judas was already in league with the high priest and that he might come at any time with the soldiers. The disciples were not aware of the seriousness of the situation. They were tired, sleepy and fearful but they were not asleep because the Aramaic word *Dmikhey*, sleeping, also means reclining.

Jesus was praying aloud for he had reached a crisis.

During such times of stress Easterners generally raise their voices and pray to God as though conversing with him. The disciples no doubt heard some of his utterances. If they had been near him, they might have reported all that he said. In these last moments Jesus was entrusting himself to the will of his Father. He was conversing with him in a loud voice just as a son talking to his father or one friend to another. But there were times when he was deeply moved and yielded to tears and his words were not distinct. Matt. 26 : 39.



SWEAT TURNED INTO BLOOD

And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly: and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.
Luke 22 : 44.

This is an Oriental saying for distress and suffering. It does not mean that the sweat literally turned into blood. The writer was describing the agony through which Jesus passed during the hour of prayer in Gethsemane, and he tried to emphasize the temptation, suffering and fear which befell him. Sweat turning into blood means in Aramaic that he was passing through difficulties and trials. When a man is very fearful it is said he turns white or his sweat turns into blood. Easterners also speak of a murderer's leaven of bread turning into blood. These sayings are symbolic of eastern thought concerning some of the sharp experiences of life and are never taken literally at their face value.



THE KISS OF JUDAS

And while he yet spake, behold a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him.

But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? Luke 22 : 48.

Some Easterners never kiss their wives and children but they kiss their friends on the cheek when greeting them. A host kisses his guests on their arrival at his house. Friends who have not seen each other for a long time, show their affection for each other in this way. When enemies become reconciled, the kiss is a sign of friendship. In the East kissing is a token of sacred friendship, but occasionally it is deceptive and misleading. While Joab was kissing Amasa he plunged the sword into his body. (2 Sam. 20 : 9) When a man desires to destroy his enemies, he invites them to his home and greets them with a kiss and after entertaining them lavishly, he orders his servants to kill them.

Even though a kiss is a sacred bond between two men, it is a disgrace to kiss a woman, even one's own wife, in public. If a girl happens to be kissed, she is humbled and disgraced so that she may not easily be married. If her parents happen to be influential they would avenge her, even to the extent of murdering the man who kissed her.

Judas kissed Jesus not only as a sign to point him out to the soldiers and the servants of the high priests, but also as a mark of his discipleship. He did not want Jesus to know he was implicated in the plot. He pretended he was innocent, and that he was not responsible for the soldiers who followed him, implying he himself was in danger as were the rest of the other disciples. This is evident for Judas did not appear at the trial of Jesus. He could have been used as a witness against Jesus, and perhaps his words might have carried more weight in convicting his master. But Judas fled and secretly kept in touch with the high priests to see what was going to happen to Jesus. When he found his Lord was condemned

to die, he regretted what he had done because he did not expect such a result. He thought Jesus might be chastised and threatened and then set free. When it turned out differently, he came back to the high priests and returned their money, stating it was blood money and that he was deceived by them. They replied to him that was his own affair. Matt. 26 : 48; Mark 14 : 44.



YOUR TURN

When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness.
 Luke 22 : 53.

The Aramaic word *shaa*, hour, also means, turn. In the present instance the reference is to turn and not hour. When Easterners are persecuted they say, "It is your turn, do what you please." The Pharisees and priests had sought to seize Jesus but they were afraid of the people. On some occasions he had escaped out of their hands. Now it was their turn because Jesus had accomplished his mission. He had preached for three years and laid the foundation of a new order. He was now ready to die. He need no longer flee from his accusers. He was now in their hands and their turn had come and they could have their own way. They could put him to death in any manner they wished and he would make no protest or defense.



THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD

Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God.
 Luke 22 : 69.

The Semites think of God in spiritual and not in physical terms. But when they refer to his qualities they speak of him in human terms. God is described as having

hands and feet, but this is symbolical and not literal. The right hand is the symbol of power and authority. Oriental kings seat their loyal subjects on the right at official banquets as a token of appreciation and honor. Queens also sit at the right of kings.

Easterners look with suspicion on whatever is done with the left hand. A present is offered with the right hand. Saluting likewise is always done by the right hand. An Eastern bishop blesses the people with his uplifted right hand and the people kiss his right hand. The left hand is considered a bad omen and rouses suspicions. Jesus was the beloved Son of God and his triumphant victory on earth would accord him all honor and glory in heaven. He would sit on the right hand of God; that is to say, all power and authority would be entrusted to him. Mark 14 : 62.



BEARING THE CROSS WITH JESUS

And as they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, a Cyrenian, coming out of the country, and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus.

Luke 23 : 26.

Simon was probably of the city of Cyrene in Africa. Either his family or he had migrated to Palestine. In the east strangers and immigrants are always called by the name of the city or country from which they or their ancestors have come. Simon was compelled to help Jesus carry his cross, and not to relieve him of the heavy burden, as is supposed. The eastern text reads "bearing the cross after Jesus"; this means that Jesus was bearing the front part and walking ahead and Simon was carrying the lower end. The heaviest part of the cross rested on Jesus' shoulders because it had the cross bar. His position was more trying and exhausting as he climbed the steep hill with this burden. It was difficult for him to

hold on to the cross and ascend, more especially as the arm of the cross grazed the ground.



GREEN AND DRY TREES

*For if they do these things in a green tree, what shall
be done in the dry?* Luke 23 : 31.

This is an Aramaic symbolism referring to fire and wood. In the Eastern text it is wood instead of tree. Fire consumes green wood slowly but the dry wood burns quickly. Jesus used this allegory to refer to himself and the people who were weeping over him, when he was bearing his cross and climbing the steep hill of Golgotha. He told the daughters of Jerusalem, "Weep not for me but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, the days are coming, in the which they shall say, Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck."

Green wood is symbolical of innocence and dry wood of guilt. If suffering was inflicted on an innocent man, how much more would be done to sinners? Jesus was the green wood which the Jews were kindling, but the days were to come when the Romans would do the same thing to the Jewish people, who were like dry wood ready to be consumed when Jerusalem was conquered. Their suffering and destruction would be greater for they were to fall on the roads, women were to leave their children and flee for their lives, husbands and wives were to be separated and carried captive, the dead were to be left unburied with no one to weep over them. Jesus had many mourners who after his death anointed his body and buried him. This was what made him so apprehensive even in that hour when death was approaching, to warn the women who had come from Galilee with him and the daughters of Jerusalem who had come to see him die, not to weep for him but for themselves, because they would have no mourners in the day of their desolation.

A sinner need not lament over the death of a righteous person but should rather mourn over his own sins. The world need not mourn over the death of Jesus, for he did not regard his own death as a loss, nor did the nails and spear prevent him from giving new life to the human race.



NAILED ON THE CROSS

And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him, and the malefactors, one on the right hand, and the other on the left.

Luke 23 : 33.

The Aramaic word *zakpo* means to stretch out the hands and nail upon the cross. Criminals were nailed and not tied upon a cross, as some commentators and pictures suggest. The latter method would have prolonged death and the pain would have been less. The victim would thus be exposed to thirst, cold and heat, and finally die of starvation. On the other hand, the nails would cause severe suffering and quick death. The loss of blood would make the thirst more intense. The public, moreover, demanded this kind of death in order to make sure the victim was dead. No spectator would be willing to remain more than three or four hours on the scene, nor would the soldiers keep guard for several days. In the case of Jesus the high priests wanted execution to take place promptly so that it would be possible to lower the bodies from their crosses before the Sabbath approached. The whole drama took four or five hours. If the victims had not been nailed, they would not have died during this period. Even to-day criminals are speedily put to death in eastern countries because of the spectacular appeal. In Persia they are placed in front of a cannon and the whole procedure lasts only a few minutes. Matt. 27 : 33; Mark 15 : 22; John 19 : 17.



PARADISE

*And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee,
Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. Luke 23 : 43.*

The word *pardesa* is a Persian word meaning garden. This word is also used in Semitic language to mean a beautiful garden full of trees, flowers and springs of water. Persia is famous for its roses and beautiful gardens. Most regions of the country, especially those bordering on Mesopotamia, are very fertile and well watered by rivers and brooks. Flowers grow wild and nature has endowed the land with all that makes for beauty and loveliness.

On the Western border of Mesopotamia are Arabia, Syria and Palestine, where trees are few and water scarce. Persia looks like a paradise to the eye of a traveller who enters it by way of these countries and the Arabian desert. The contrast is so strong that to the people of these other lands Persian gardens are symbolic of the heavenly gardens.

When nomadic Mohammedan forces conquered Persia they were amazed with the beauty and attractiveness which surpassed anything they had seen in their own desert countries. Heaven was pictured by Mohammedan theologians as a Persian garden full of trees bearing fruit, their branches hanging down to the ground, so that men could pick the fruit while they reclined under the shade of the trees. Water streamed from cold springs and ran through the garden. Green gardens, trees and cold water were alluring to the people born in an arid land where such luxuries existed only in dreams and fairy tales. Nothing could have fulfilled the desire of these desert people, raised on hardships, like Persia, a place of comfort and luxury.

The thirst and suffering of the penitent thief on the cross were to cease and his dreams of comfort and bliss be realized, when he entered the Paradise of heaven, on the assured promise of Jesus.

According to the Aramaic manner of speech, the em-

phasis in this text is on the word "today" and should read, "Truly I say to you today, you will be with me in Paradise." The promise was made on that day and it was to be fulfilled later. This is a characteristic of Oriental speech implying that the promise was made on a certain day and would surely be kept.



BURYING A STRANGER

This man went unto Pilate, and begged the body of Jesus.

And he took it down, and wrapped it in linen, and laid it in a sepulchre that was hewn in stone, wherein never man before was laid.

Luke 23 : 52, 53.

Births and deaths bring no expenses to an Eastern family. They are regarded as natural events. Infants are born in homes without the aid of doctors or nurses. The burial of the dead is a responsibility of the town. Eastern generosity is never so lavishly shown as at the funeral of a neighbor. The immediate relatives of the dead are wholly relieved of all duties and expenses. Men and women volunteer their services in taking charge of the house. Food for the professional mourners and the out-of-town guests is furnished by the town people. All the articles for the burial are generally given by friends and nearest relatives. The grave is opened by the townsmen. The birth of a male child brings joy to the whole town, while the death of men and women causes sorrow to everyone.

In the case of strangers who die or are killed, burial articles are contributed by rich and religious men. In the East it is sacrilegious to leave the dead unburied. Joseph of Arimathaea was a rich and religious Jew, who used his influence with Pilate. He was of Judaea but he did not wish to see even a Galilean religious leader, though condemned by his people, left unburied. Such occasions to bury the dead are considered opportunities to do good.



THE ASCENSION

And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.

Luke 24 : 51.

Over the Arabian Desert where the stars near the horizon look as though they touch the ground, heaven does not seem so far away. The Assyrians and Babylonians, even though advanced in astronomy, had but a vague idea of distance. They knew about the stars, their positions and their movements. They made calendars and measured time but they knew very little of the distance between the earth and heaven. This fact is illustrated by their building the Tower of Babel in their attempt to ascend into heaven to fight God. They thought heaven was not more than a mile and a half above the earth, just a little distance above the clouds. Moreover, their conception of the earth was totally different from ours. They believed heaven was above the earth and there was also an unknown place under the earth. People either ascended or descended. This theory still exists among most Semitic people in the East who believe the stars and the moon are little lamps hung in heaven for the decoration of the earth.

Jesus, after conversing with his disciples and followers at this last appearance, disappeared. They saw him go up to heaven. We cannot exactly figure what happened but the Jews believed the prophets could ascend to heaven. Moses and Elijah had already demonstrated this power. It was not hard for the early Christians to believe their Lord also ascended but, as I have previously said, the Ascension was spiritual. Jesus ascended with the spiritual body with which he arose from the grave. In Aramaic and Hebrew the same word, universe, means heaven. Heaven is a later term given when the question of the resurrection developed. The Jews believed a place was designated in the universe for the good people and the bad were tormented in a hell somewhere under the earth. In heaven there is no distance, no north, no south,

no east, no west. These are relative and man's own invention for his convenience. They do not exist in spirit.

Jesus has always been present with his followers. He is continually working to achieve the aim of his mission and to bring the everlasting kingdom. Just as he said, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Matt. 18: 20. "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Matt. 28: 20.



MARTHA AND MARY

But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? bid her therefore that she help me.
Luke 10 : 39, 40, 41.

When an honorable guest is entertained, all women in the house and the servants drop their work to serve. In the Holy Land, there is nothing more important than entertaining an honorable guest, especially a holy man of reputation. Women would neglect their babies and their bread in the oven and food on the fire, to serve the honorable guest first. No woman of the household is exempt from this duty. Some sweep, others rush to borrow bread, plates and other necessities and still others are occupied with cooking and other preparation.

When father and mother are dead or are not present, the eldest sister acts as hostess when an honorable man is received in the house. The guest, on his arrival, is immediately encircled by the people who had accompanied him and by those who come to greet him. Members of the household, even though occupied with house duties and preparations, listen earnestly to conversations. Women who are acquaintances or relatives of the honorable guest would not hesitate to join the group to listen and to ask questions. Nevertheless, such a familiarity is often disapproved of by the older and more conservative women who adhere to the strict Eastern etiquette.

Jesus was a friend of Lazarus and his sisters, Martha and Mary. He had known them for a long time and had been in their house on previous occasions. This is why Mary did not consider Jesus a stranger and sat talking to him freely. Even though Jesus was a distinguished prophet, Mary treated him as a member of the family. On the other hand, Martha was not jealous of her sister. She was worried because she felt there was not enough homage paid to Jesus and she was not willing to see her sister sit idle in his presence. This was because there was much work to be done as there were many guests to be cared for. There were also many curiosity seekers and beggars in addition to the honorable guest and his followers. In the East, on such occasions, women must not sit idle in the presence of a notable guest even though there is nothing to do. In the eyes of strangers, such departures from the etiquette are looked upon as a lack of hospitality and interest.

Jesus told Martha that she was too careful about etiquette and troubled over little things, and that it was all right for Mary to sit down and talk with him instead of rushing around being busy. Jesus told her he needed no further attention. Mary was greatly interested in listening to his words which were much more important than mere Eastern formalities. This is why Jesus said, "But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her." Mary entertained him with conversation and listened to his teaching which, to Jesus, was more important than attention to etiquette. There was no jealousy or feeling on the part of Martha and Mary. Martha's rebuke to her sister was just like that of a mother to a daughter, which a younger sister in the East gladly accepts.



ENTER NOT INTO TEMPTATION

*And when he was at the place, he said unto them, Pray
that ye enter not into temptation.* Luke 22 : 40.

“Enter not into temptation” means do not let us be carried away by worldly things that weaken the forces of the spirit. Aramaic-speaking people often say, “Do not let us be in need.” When a husband goes on a journey, his wife’s last farewell remark to him is, “Do not leave us in want.” The Aramaic word for temptations also means trials and difficulties which often cause one to go astray. It does not mean that God would lead us into temptations and difficulties, but that he will prevent us from going astray, consciously or otherwise, when we seek his help. Judas, in his temptation when he sold his master, was tempted by the love for money and not by God. St. James in his epistle says, “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.” James 1:13. God guides those who pray and look to him for help to overcome the temptations of life.

Jesus knew his disciples and followers would meet worldly temptations just as Judas did. He saw from the very beginning that his teaching would have a universal appeal and would overthrow the existing religious systems of his day. His followers would receive honor and fame, but pride and greed would entice them and weaken their unity. Jesus even anticipated the strifes and divisions which took place after his death. These divisions are the fruits of the ambitions of men who, during their temptations, did not seek God’s help, but placed more value on honors and material things than the things of spirit.



ST. JOHN

John, son of Zebedee and brother of James, was from the town of Bethsaida, Galilee. He was one of the first disciples of our Lord. He and his brother James occupied prominent places among the disciples. According to tradition, John was the youngest of all disciples. This was probably the reason why he survived during the reign of Trajan 98 A.D.

John was always closer to Jesus than any of the disciples. He accompanied Jesus to the house of Jairus, to the Mount of Transfiguration, to Gethsemane, and was the only disciple who with his mother Salome, stood near the cross (Mark 15 : 40; 16 : 1). John did not desert his Master while the others had fled when their Lord was arrested. He was probably related to Jesus and therefore took hazards to remain with him to the end (John 19 : 25). This is also why Jesus commended his mother Mary to John's care.

After the crucifixion John occupied a less important place at Jerusalem than that held by James and Simon Peter (Acts 3 : 1). This was on account of his youth or because he was engaged in some other work outside of Judaea. Paul called him the pillar of the church (Gal. 2 : 9). He was, however, in Jerusalem for some time (Acts 3 : 1; 4 : 13, 19.) Later he was sent with Peter to Samaria but he suddenly disappeared from the picture, and nothing was heard of him. Tradition places him at Ephesus in Asia Minor, but Paul on his various journeys to Asia Minor never mentioned meeting him. He might have come to Ephesus after the death of Paul to supervise the work in Asia Minor, which at this time required the presence of an apostle.

John's authorship of the Fourth Gospel, Revelation and other writings attributed to him is also disputed. It also

has strong supporters as in the case of the other gospels. It is interesting to note the Eastern Christians never disputed the authorship of the gospel of John, but rejected the Book of Revelation which was accepted as canonical as late as the fourth century.

This confusion is partially due to the fact that some Europeans and Americans are not fully acquainted with conditions of authorship in the East. They seem to be unaware of difficulties under which early Christian literature was written, and that such work was condemned and often destroyed by order of the government. In the first place, as we have said, authorship in the East is totally different from that of America and Europe, where an author of a book is the actual writer. In the East, the book is called by the name of the person about whom it is written or else bears the title of the subject matter.

This is true of the gospel of John. The book is about Jesus; John is the author of the material, which was according to his preaching. Who wrote this gospel or compiled it, no one can tell; but John was clearly responsible for the entire account of it. Like other disciples he must have had written documents. He had been with Jesus and with the disciples in Jerusalem when the Christian church was first organized. He probably dictated his material, and instructed the scribe to write his gospel in the most appropriate way. John might also have had some rabbinical education, even though the Jewish priests and elders called both him and Peter, unlearned men. (Acts 4 : 13).

That John wrote his gospel about 95 A.D., as some scholars claim, is hard to believe. Why should he wait so long? There was no reason for it. This assumption is due to confusing the date of the original gospel with the time that its copy appeared. In the East even today, the date of the copy of an original is always dated from the day and year in which the copyist completes his work. For instance a book written in 1500 A.D. and copied in 1936 would bear the date when the copy was finished. The copyist, however, adds "this book is written 1936," instead of "copied" in that year because the same word is used to

mean write or copy. A stranger not only will mistake the copyist for the author but will be led to believe that the book was actually written in 1936. John had an early original copy with him from which translations and other copies were made later. This might have happened during the conversion of the Greeks. John, like the other disciples, at the beginning, preached to the Jews who were living among Gentiles.

The external evidence for the gospel of John is based upon the testimony of his two disciples, Polycarp and Papias, as reported by Irenaeus. There is only one John to whom the authorship of the Fourth Gospel could be attributed and that is John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee. The Fourth Gospel is quite unlike the Synoptic Gospels. It was written for the Christians of Asia Minor. The author omitted the genealogy and birth of Jesus because the Jews in this region had lost their sense of nationality and their traditional theology. This is why they allowed Paul to speak in their synagogues in support of the Man whom the Jewish ecclesiastical authorities had sent to the Cross as a heretic and malefactor. Then again the Jews in these northern parts were mostly descendants of the Ten Tribes and were not very friendly to the Jews in the South.

THE WORD

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. John 1 : 1.

According to the Eastern text the emphasis is on "the word." The writer is referring to *miltha* which is Aramaic and means the utterance or the word of God. The Hebrew word is *dabar* which means to speak. The reference here is to the Christ, the Messiah whom God promised through his word, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as the indispensable and only Saviour of mankind. "And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed"; "The scepter shall not depart from Judah until Shiloh come." (Genesis 12 : 3; 49 : 10)

The author of this Gospel is proving that the word (Christ) existed from the beginning because he was the Word of God, and God has no beginning or ending, and his promises are eternal. That is to say, the Word and God were both at the beginning, but the Word is the utterance of God.

Angels and prophets proclaimed God's words when they said "Thus saith the Lord." Their words were accepted as God's words because they spoke as representatives of God.

In the east representatives who carry messages from the king are honored with the honor due a king. The king's words must be respected and obeyed. Any remark against his utterances would be regarded as an offence against his own person. "A man is valued by his words," is an Eastern saying.

The author of this Gospel used Semitic words and terms in connecting Jesus with the divine Messianic promises. This is in keeping with Oriental beliefs that angels are the messengers of God's words. The births of John the Baptist and of Jesus were announced by angels. It is

therefore inconceivable that John, the son of Zebedee, a plain fisherman, could have used a Greek term like Logos with a meaning alien to Semitic thought.



BELOVED

No man hath seen God at any time: the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.
John 1 : 18.

The Aramaic word *yekhidaya* means beloved, and also only male child. A man may have several daughters but one son. The son is known as *yekhidaya*, the only male child. The Aramaic word *bukhra* first born, is the same as the Hebrew word *bakhar* which means first fruits.

In a family where there are many females but only one male child, more attention is paid to the male. The father and mother are wrapped up in him, and his sisters weave garments for him and wait on him. He is the heir of his father and the one who carries the family name for future generations. In eastern countries females cannot inherit property. A male child is always loved and needed in order to preserve the family and its possessions. When a man dies without a male issue, his daughters and his property are divided among his nearest male relatives, and his own family may even be left destitute.

Jesus is the beloved Son of God because he is the first born of his father and the first one who thought of God as a loving Father. The Hebrew conception of God was that of an overlord, who could be approached only by intermediaries. Jesus unveiled the mystery of God and was thus recognized as the first born and the beloved of his Father.



THE LAMB OF GOD

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

John 1 : 29.

When men and women visit shrines and holy places they pledge a lamb or an ox to God. The worshippers, during their prayers, ask God to grant their requests, promising to offer him a gift when he has granted their petition. On the other hand, easterners believe that God has a share in their sheep and other products because God is the source of all supplies. They must give in order to receive. Fat lambs and oxen without blemish are pledged to God before they are born.

Early in the spring when sheep and cows have given birth, the family selects the best lamb for God. It is therefore called God's lamb and it is loved and specially cared for. It becomes the shepherd's favorite. Parents show the lamb of God to their boys and girls and explain to them why the animal was dedicated to God.

During summer or early autumn, the lamb is taken to a shrine where it is sacrificed. Its blood is rubbed on the forehead of the man for whose sake the lamb was dedicated. The meat is divided among the people or broiled and eaten at the shrine.

Jesus was without sin. He was the lamb without blemish, which humanity had chosen to offer to God. A righteous man dying for sinners was to do away with the sacrifice of dumb animals. He was to be the living spiritual sacrifice of love, which continually remains on God's altar.



THE MESSIAH

He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.
John 1 : 41.

The word Messiah is *Mshikha* in Aramaic and Hebrew. It is derived from the word *Mshakh* which means to anoint with oil. The Aramaic word for oil is *Mishkha*.

Oil was often used for medicinal purposes and poured on the wounds of the body. As water is scarce in the East, the skin often encrusts and there is nothing more refreshing than a little oil rubbed on to soften it. Travelers often anoint their feet and hands after an exhausting journey. Men and women anoint their heads and at times their bodies. After women take baths they anoint their heads with olive oil or butter.

As medicines and doctors are unknown, olive oil and butter are used to protect the skin. In the eyes of Easterners, oil is sacred, and is used to anoint the sick and for ordination and other ceremonial purposes. Prophets and kings in the olden days were anointed with oil.

There is another Aramaic word *Messiah* which differs from the word *Mshikha*. It means mediator or intermediary. It is probable that the Hebrews borrowed this Chaldean term *Messiah* during the Babylonian captivity and used it concerning the Promised One who was to bring reconciliation between God and his estranged people. In truth the Messiah is a mediator between God and man (Galatians 3 : 20). He was ordained for this mission from the very beginning, because God knew that all other efforts would fail and that his truth must finally be revealed by his own word in Jesus Christ. Matt. 16 : 20; Mark 8 : 29; Luke 9 : 20.



SIMON KEPA

And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone.

John 1 : 42.

The Greek word *Petros*, stone, is a translation of the Aramaic word *kepa* which means stone. Simon in Aramaic is *Shimon*, meaning hearing, keen perception. It is one of the most popular and common names among Semites. It is a sacred name which a mother gives to her son when God has answered a prayer for a male child, signifying God has heard her voice. All Semitic names have some religious meaning. Easterners do not use the names of common articles for human beings but when Easterners are angry with one another, they use nicknames which are disparaging. Peter was the nickname for Simon because he did not grasp things easily. If a man's name meant "sweet" but he did not have a good disposition, he would be called "sour." In the case of Simon he was called a stone because he could not quickly understand. It would have been an insult to Simon if Jesus who had met him for the first time called him a stone. Jesus was merely repeating what was commonly known about him.

Andrew brought his brother Simon and introduced him to Jesus. While Jesus was greeting him, he said to him, "You are Simon the son of Jona; you are called *Kepa*." Jesus thus implied he had heard of Simon and practically knew him. People knew of one another without being acquainted. Simon was probably a fisherman and hunter of reputation as these occupations give one publicity in the East. The name Peter does not occur in the Eastern text which uses the names Simon or Simon Kepa. The nickname, Simon Kepa, was used to distinguish him from Simon the Canaanite and other Simons.



UNDER THE FIG TREE

*Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me?
Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip
called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw
thee.* John 1 : 48.

I have seen you under the fig tree" is an idiom which means I have known you since you were a child, or since you were in the cradle. Fig trees serve as a protection from the sun in the hot summer months. While the women work in the fields their babies lie under the shadow of the trees. To say "I have seen you under the fig tree" does not mean I have actually seen you under the tree, but I know you very well. There is a tradition that when Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt, Jesus saw Nathaniel under a fig tree, but how could Jesus, a baby, remember that?

Jesus seems to have known something of Nathaniel's character and good reputation. Nazareth is not very far from the Lake of Galilee. Easterners speak and know of one another even though they have never met. The acknowledgment by Jesus of the good qualities of Nathaniel led him to surrender himself to Jesus as the Son of God and the King of Israel.



THE WEDDING AT CANA

*And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith
unto him, They have no wine.*

*Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with
thee? mine hour is not yet come.* John 2 : 3, 4.

The Eastern text reads, "What is it to me and to you, woman? my turn has not yet come." This means, "of what concern is it of ours. It is not my turn to buy wine." This rendering is more expressive of an Oriental wedding custom. Jesus did not rebuke his mother as stated in the King James version, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? Mine hour is not yet come."

The Aramaic word *shaa* means hour, time, turn; but in this verse it means turn. Jesus was referring to the custom of entertaining. At a wedding feast men sit on the floor in a line in the order of their age and social standing. The women sit on the opposite side but in a circle. The musicians and servants occupy a position near the door. Food is generously furnished by the bridegroom. Favorite dishes are also brought in by the neighbors as gifts to the bridal couple. Wine is provided by the guests. Everything is done on a liberal scale.

The guests take their turns in ordering the servants to procure the wine. When the wine is being poured the servant mentions the name of the guest who has purchased it. It is then drunk by all to the health and happiness of the bridal couple. Every guest must do his duty in this matter so as to make the wedding banquet a success. It is however contrary to Eastern etiquette for any guest to call out of turn on a servitor to bring wine until his own turn has come. If this were done, even by mistake, it would cause resentment among the guests who had not yet had their turn. Such a departure from this traditional practice would also be regarded as an insult to the guests of higher standing as it is incumbent upon every guest at such a time to give proof of his friendship and loyalty to the bridegroom. If any guest fails in this duty, he is regarded as an enemy.

An Eastern wedding generally lasts from three to seven days and nights. Even though Easterners are usually sober, they drink heavily on these festal occasions. The men are almost compelled to get drunk. Eastern women do not drink at weddings but they sit and watch their husbands and sons enjoying themselves. They are often absorbed in conversation and gossip about the bride but they constantly keep an eye on their male relatives. An Eastern woman would be hurt if the name of her husband or son were not mentioned as entertaining.

At the wedding feast at Cana Mary, her eyes fastened on her son, sat with a group of women. Among the guests, Jesus was the only one sober. It was evident he had not yet taken his part in entertaining. Meanwhile

there was a lull in the course of the festivities. The servants were standing idle, for according to the Eastern text, "the wine had decreased." Mary, supposing it was Jesus' turn to treat the guests, made a sign to him with her eyes, as much as to say, "they have no wine." Jesus replied by signs indicating his turn had not yet come. Mary then turned to the servants who were standing near her and whispered to do whatever he requested them, meaning when Jesus sent them to procure wine, she would pay for it.

Mary and Jesus had come a distance from Nazareth to Cana. In the East when a mother and son travel together the mother holds the family purse, because Eastern bandits regard it cowardly to rob a woman. Mary had not the least thought that Jesus would perform a miracle. Hitherto her son had given no proof of his Messianic powers, nor had he wrought any miracles. Why should she expect him to perform a miracle at this time? She was really the most surprised and gratified of all, when she heard the guests exclaim that what was served them last was the best of all. The guests had expected water from the jars which the servants had brought to Jesus in response to his command to fill the jars with water. Instead they were served with the best drink of the feast.

Religious men who attend banquets not only decline to purchase wine for the guests but also urge the guests to stop drinking because they fear drunkenness which, as often happens, results in quarrels and perhaps murder. Generally religious men do not drink. They try to pacify guests who insist on more wine. It would therefore be scandalous for a religious man to order wine. They suggest water. When the wine decreased, Jesus did not order wine nor did he pray over the water to change it into wine. He simply ordered the servants to give the guests water which, to the chief guest, tasted best of all. Jesus did not claim he changed water into an intoxicant. When John the Baptist asked "Art thou he that should come?", Jesus answered by saying the blind had received sight, the lame walked and the dead raised but he did not say he had changed water into wine. (Matt. 11 : 3-5)

The writer of the Gospel recorded this incident some fifteen or twenty years after Jesus' death. His statement is based solely on the remark made by the chief guest. Jesus solved the shortage of wine by offering the guests water and quenching their thirst with a spiritual wine. Water is the best and most precious drink in the world. People can live without wine but no living creature can live without water. Water is symbolic of life, light and truth and wine is symbolic of teachings polluted with traditions. The Galileans had hitherto been governed by theology and traditions but thereafter they would be governed by the teaching of Jesus.

As the word alcohol was unknown in Biblical times, the writer of this Gospel does not mention whether the water Jesus offered the guests became intoxicant or not. Wine is a general term. It does not carry a specific alcoholic content because in the east there is only one kind of wine, grape juice. Some ancient churches used unfermented wine for Communion. Others diluted fermented wine to contain two parts of water to one part of wine. In either case, it was then and is today called wine.

This miracle has a spiritual significance. Jesus' teaching was the best the Galileans had ever heard. Jesus had divine power but would he use it to supply more wine to guests who had already been drinking too much? The Scriptures condemn drunkenness. . . . "Nor drunkards . . . shall inherit the Kingdom of God." (1 Cor. 6 : 10)



DEALERS AND MONEY CHANGERS

And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting:

And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables;

John 2 : 14, 15.

The streets of oriental cities are very narrow and one may only walk in single file in either direction. Even today crowds which gather before the shops in Jerusa-

lem are dispersed to make traffic easier. Peddlers and small traders follow up prospective buyers for hours offering bargains to induce them to buy.

Jesus made a whip of small cords twisted together and tied at both ends. Cord is always found in the market places. It is used to tie burdens on men and on the backs of animals. Jesus did not put out the regular merchants. He put out the money changers and those who were buying animals in advance of the Passover to hold for large profits. He upset the trays of the money changers. There were no tables and they are still unknown in the Orient. Money changers sit on the ground, close to the walls of the houses.

One can easily see how this mistranslation occurred. In Aramaic the same word is used for buying as for selling. A dot over the second letter means selling, or a dot under the same letter means buying.

It would be more reasonable to believe that Jesus dispersed the tumultuous crowd which was bargaining, swearing, spitting and doing dishonest business that should not be carried on in the temple grounds. He would not have interfered with the legitimate temple business permitted during festivals. Thousands of people had come from outside towns and far countries. They had to purchase oxen, sheep and doves for their sacrifice. They had to exchange their money for temple money, which was the only legal money that could be offered to God.

It was dishonesty that annoyed Jesus.



ZEAL—DEFEND

And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up. John 2 : 17.

This is an idiom of northern Aramaic, used even today by Assyrian people, and means the zeal of your house has made me courageous. That is to say, it has strengthened me to fight and defend your house. "Eaten" here means to defend. There are several other idioms like

this, which cannot be easily rendered into western thought. For instance, an Assyrian says to another, "I have come to heal your head" which means, "I have come to comfort you over the loss of a member of your family." It is also said, "he has eaten wrath," which means he is enraged. Another saying, "eat the care of my family" which means look after the interests of my family.

Jesus grieved when he saw the temple which was his father's house for prayer made a center of business and corruption. The zeal for his father's house made him courageous to drive out the peddlers and rebuke the temple authorities.



DESTROY THIS TEMPLE

Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. John 2 : 19.

The phrase "destroy this temple" is another northern Aramaic idiom. The reference is not to the Temple as such but to Jewish doctrine, tradition and ritual. The Temple was the center of Jewish worship, the place of abode of the God of Israel. Since its erection worship was centralized in Judaea and God was localized in the Jewish Temple. "I will destroy this temple" means I will destroy all these doctrines and false beliefs and build a new temple not made with hands.

Jesus was also referring to the temple of his body, and to his death and resurrection in three days. After this event he would build up the true religion of humanity and inaugurate a new system of worship. Priesthood and sacrifice would go on forever. After three days a new high priest would sit in heaven and act as the intermediary of his followers.

The Jews took these sayings literally because this type of symbolism was foreign to those who spoke Chaldean Aramaic. They thought that he would literally tear down the Temple and rebuild it in three days. This certainly

sounded insane and blasphemous. Indeed, the chief accusation against him was based upon this assertion which they had misunderstood. Even to-day in the East, it is a blasphemy to use such words about a church building. When a church wall falls down or is destroyed it is said "The wall is resting." It would be sacrilegious to say plainly that the wall is destroyed because it is a part of God's house, and everything belonging to it is sacred.



THE JEWISH TEMPLE CONDEMNED

Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?

John 2 : 20.

The Jewish temple was the center of the state and religion in Judaea. It was the most precious symbol of this people and of their former glory. Around it all their sacred institutions were built, and its authority was supported by tradition and law. It had also become a center of pride, craft and corruption. Revolutions and wars were proclaimed in the name of God and in the defence of his Temple. Spoils and offerings of silver and gold were accumulated in this holy place. Its rich treasures were thus coveted by foreign rulers. Whenever Jerusalem was invaded, these treasures were carried away. The temple which was established for the pure worship of God and to be a blessing to his people had become a curse.

Jesus wanted the religion of humanity to be established on justice and love rather than on a Temple embellished with silver and gold. He had decided to do away with the priesthood and its autocratic power. The traditions, the Temple and its sacrifices were to disappear before the proclamation of the Gospel. The new temple was to be built in the heart of man. The God hitherto worshipped by sacrifices was now to be worshipped in spirit. Jehovah, Lord of hosts, whom the priests and prophets could not see or approach, was soon to become the Father of men

Jesus' attack on the Temple was meant to be an attack on the institution of the priesthood which had become an hierarchy, and which was to end forever. It was not an attack on the stones which had often been previously destroyed and was again to suffer a like fate. Jesus was to build a new Temple and write a new religion through his death and resurrection. It was to be a Temple not built with human hands but a religion which did not need Aaronic descendants as its high priests. Jesus himself was to be high priest after the order of Melchizedek.



BORN AGAIN

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. John 3 : 3.

The Aramaic word for born is *yalad* and the word for boy is *yalda*. To be born again is a Galilean or northern Aramaic expression which means to become like a little child, that is to say, to change one's thoughts and habits, and become simple like a child and start all over to learn anew. One often hears an easterner saying "He is simple, pure and harmless like a child." A child has nothing in his heart against anyone. He knows no creed and has no racial hatred. A little Jewish boy loves Christian and pagan people as much as he loves his own people.

Nicodemus was a Jewish lawyer and a teacher of theology and tradition and he was too old to change. He came at night to see Jesus hoping to persuade him to change his attitude towards Jewish theology and traditions and to be more conciliatory towards the high priests. It seems that Nicodemus told Jesus that it was useless to build on any strange foundation, but that it was better to build on the Jewish religion which the prophets had laid down.

Jesus knew that the Jewish faith and teaching were supplemented by the tradition of the elders. The doctrines

of man had taken the place of the teachings of the Scriptures. The blind guides could not lead the people to God. The whole system had to collapse. It was of no use to build on it as the entire structure had to be changed and rebuilt. Men had first to free themselves from dogmatic theology and the traditions of the elders in order to understand the meaning of the new law and the teaching of Jesus, which was to be engraved on human hearts. Nicodemus was unable to understand the word "born again" because Jesus spoke in Galilean Aramaic and the Jews of Judaea spoke Chaldaean Aramaic. This word was taken literally by Nicodemus. What Jesus meant however was not a physical but a spiritual experience.



DARKNESS

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. John 3 : 19.

In most parts of the east, robberies, banditry and crime are committed during the night. Nearly all evil things happen during the hours of darkness. Strange as it may seem, a man may hold a noble position during the day but at night he goes out on the road to rob travelers. In some cases religious men, after performing their daily services, engage in robbery at night. Sheep and oxen are stolen. These acts are committed at night in order to hide the identity of the robber.

Immorality is also practiced in the darkness; so that the act may not be brought to the light. In the east it is difficult to do evil things by day without revealing the person's identity and the act and punishment is severe. One reason for this is that many families live under the same roof and there is no such thing as privacy. Those who do good deeds are not afraid of light for they want their deeds to be seen by men. Evil doers are ashamed when their works are brought to the light. "There is

nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known." Matt. 10 : 26.



BAPTIZING BEYOND JORDAN

And John also was baptizing in Ænon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized.
John 3 : 23.

The Aramaic word *ævra* is derived from *abar* to cross. *Ævra* means crossing place. This was the place where the caravans met and crossed on either side of the river Jordan. It was a place known to travelers. John was baptizing at this place because he could easily meet people traveling in both directions.

Salem and Bethabara were on the western banks of the river Jordan and not on the eastern side. Probably they were near Jericho. John could not have baptized in the desert beyond Jordan. There would have been no water there. On the other hand, why should he go so far from Jerusalem and other populous cities which were situated west of Jordan. *Annon* is an Aramaic word of Chaldean origin meaning springs. *Bethabara* is a verbal noun. *Beth* means house, *abara* fords.

Baptism was practiced by most eastern religions. It was a form of ablution and a sign of initiation of new members. A convert was washed, signifying that he was cleansed from all doctrines, dogmas and evils of the faith in which he had been brought up. He became reborn in the new faith. Baptism was practiced before John, even though it is not mentioned in Jewish practices. The Jews washed their hands and parts of their bodies before they ate meals. Baptism as an immersion originated in southern Mesopotamia. Even to-day there is a sect called Essenes or people of St. John, who are the followers of John the Baptist and practice baptism as a token of cleansing.



THE BEST MAN

He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. John 3 : 29.

Social meetings of men and women are very rare. In the east marriage is not an easy thing. Even though men eagerly look forward to their wedding day, marriage is a strenuous affair for the bridegroom. The man who hitherto had not even dared to speak to a woman is kissed and teased by all women on his wedding day.

Bridegrooms are generally bashful and retiring. They are so overwhelmed by the change and excitement that they hardly speak a word. The bride escapes all this confusion because her face is veiled. The best man acts as spokesman whenever the bridegroom wishes to say anything. He sits by his side and rejoices when the bridegroom whispers into his ear. He watches his every move and act, and is really the happiest man at the wedding.

Jesus was the bridegroom and John his best man. John was glad to hear the good news about the work of Jesus and the wonders he was doing. John had already recognized Jesus' greatness, and he was content with his mission as that of the messenger and spokesman for Jesus.



THE SEAL OF APPROVAL

He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. John 3 : 33.

Set to his seal" is an Aramaic colloquialism meaning the approval of an act. Eastern people during conversation often say "I will set my seal on all that you have said," which means I believe all you have said is true. In the east letters and documents are always stamped with a seal because people cannot read or write.

Noblemen, princes and government officials carry a seal with them, attached to their belt and are always ready for emergencies. A man's seal is his word of honor and power. Once attached to a document the conditions must be sacredly kept.

The reference here is to Jesus' works. He who accepts the testimony of Jesus sets his seal that God is true because he believes that Jesus is true.



JESUS SUSPECTED

When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John. John 4 : 1.

The translator or the copyist inadvertently changed the word Jesus in the beginning of the sentence into the word Lord, and then instead of the pronoun he, the word Jesus was inserted. This is why the King James' version reads "When therefore the Lord knew how the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John."

In the first part of the sentence it would then appear that the reference is to the Lord God, and not to Jesus, that is to say, that God knew that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus, etc. The Eastern text correctly reads: "When Jesus knew that the Pharisees had heard he made many disciples, and was baptizing more people than John."

The Pharisees were jealous of Jesus. They had been watching his movements from the start and were beginning to suspect his intentions. It was therefore dangerous for him to remain in the same place for a long period, and so he had to keep on the move.



THE LIVING WATER

The woman saith unto him, Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep: from whence then hast thou that living water? John 4 : 11.

In Palestine and Syria the shortage of water is always a problem. Because of droughts, brooks, springs and wells dry up and water has to be carried from a distance on the backs of men, women and animals. One of the hardest tasks of the housewife is to provide water for her family and one of the strongest desires of an easterner is to have abundant water flowing near his house. Reservoirs and pipe systems are practically unknown in the east and people have to depend wholly on rivers, brooks and wells. This is the case even today.

The Samaritan woman understood Jesus literally. She thought she would be relieved of her burdensome task of carrying water and wondered where he would get this living water, which constantly flows and is not stagnant and polluted. "My lord, you have no bucket and no deep well. Where do you get the living water?" The well from which she was drawing was dug by Jacob and she did not realize that Jesus was greater than Jacob. She knew nothing of the living water which Jesus offered to her, which contained truth and life. Jesus saw that the Samaritans and Jews were more thirsty for the truth than for water.



A PROPHET

The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. John 4 : 19.

The Aramaic word for prophet is *nabia* derived from the Aramaic word *naba*, to spring forth. In both cases the letter *b* is pronounced like *v*. *Nabia* means gusher. A prophet is thus a foreteller of future events and

a revealer of hidden secrets. He is also looked upon as a seer and fortune teller. When animals are lost, people consult the prophet as Saul consulted Samuel (1 Sam. 9 : 6). Unmarried girls also seek advice concerning matrimony from such individuals. Women, whose husbands are in foreign parts, enquire concerning their return and safety. In ancient times prophets also acted as statesmen and reformers to whom the people looked for guidance to peace and prosperity.

When Jesus said to the woman of Samaria "You have had five husbands," she immediately thought he was a prophet or a seer. She did not grasp his sayings concerning the living water. This is why she asked, "Are you greater than our father Jacob who gave us this well? You have no leather bucket and a deep well. Where do you get your living water?"

In the East, a prophet is recognized as a man of God, not by what he says but by what he does, and when his predictions come true.



THE JEWS

Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. John 4 : 22.

The word "Jews" is derived from the Hebrew word *Yehoda* meaning glory. This is the name which Jacob gave to his son Judah by which the tribe of Judah was known in Egypt, in the desert wanderings and after the conquest of Palestine.

When the ten tribes were carried captive to Assyria in 721 B.C., the tribes of Judah and Benjamin and the remnant of the people were known as Jews. Even before this time the tribe of Judah had attained prominence and power through the house of David. After the division between the north and the south all people who followed the house of David were called Jews. The ten tribes were later amalgamated with Assyrians, and an Assyrian colony

was established in Samaria and Galilee. These people were then called Galileans.

During the time of Jesus a man was either a Galilean or a Jew. The Galileans were also Jews by faith but racially they were different. Thus the term Jew from that time until to-day has a religious and not a racial significance. If an Egyptian or a Turk embraces the Jewish faith he is known as a Jew. Herod was a Jew by religion but an Idumaeon by race. Jesus was a Jew by faith but the scribes and Pharisees rejected him on the ground that he was a Galilean. St. Paul was a Jew by faith but from the tribe of Benjamin.

In the Near East even to-day when a man changes his religion he also changes his nationality. Thus when an Assyrian who is a Christian becomes a Mohammedan convert he is no longer called an Assyrian but is called a Moslem Turk or Kurd. So also when an Assyrian accepts the Protestant faith he is called by the nation to which the missionary belongs, English, French or American.



TALKING TO A WOMAN

And upon this came his disciples, and marvelled that he talked with the woman: yet no man said, What seekest thou? or, Why talkest thou with her? John 4 : 27.

In the east talking to women is not only not tolerated but looked upon with suspicion. It is proper to ask for a drink of water from a strange woman coming from a well or spring. She is often stopped on her way home by relatives, friends and strangers and asked for a drink from the jar which she carries on her shoulders. The woman without uttering a word hands the jar over graciously and waits until the man drinks. In the east water is generally carried only by women. It is embarrassing for a man to carry water, and men who have no women in their homes often stop their women neighbors passing their homes and ask for water. To give a thirsty

man a drink of cold water is considered a sacred duty which carries a good reward hereafter. But to ask a woman for a drink at a well or spring is an entirely different matter for in the eyes of easterners this is a breach of oriental etiquette and a reflection on one's moral character.

Most springs and wells are situated outside the towns, and are the meeting places for men and women, especially lovers. As social intercourse between men and women is not permitted, the only time when a man can see his fiancée or a woman he admires is when she goes to the well. Water is carried during the afternoons and most men know the hour when certain women go to the well. Some men go in advance and wait at the well to see their sweethearts uncovering their faces and filling their jars with water. If no one is present, some lovers would not hesitate to carry on a short conversation. Speaking to a woman at a well is resented by most easterners, who suspect the motives of those who do this. Many eastern poets speak of lovers meeting at the well or the spring. This is why the disciples were surprised when they saw Jesus conversing with a woman at the well and judged him by their own standards.



FOUR MONTHS TO HARVEST

Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.

John 4 : 35.

In Palestine it takes about four months from the time the wheat is sown until it is harvested. The sowing is done early in the spring and it requires only a few weeks to do this part of the work because each family raises just enough for its own needs. They then wait patiently for the harvest season. There is scarcely any work for them to do. The women are busy making rugs and doing house work, but the men are idle.

THE FIELDS ARE WHITE

In the Holy Land there are two harvest seasons. The barley harvest falls in April, and the wheat harvest follows several months later. Barley is one of the chief grain supplies. It is planted early and so the harvest falls early. It is greeted with much joy because it comes at a time when the entire family supply of wheat is exhausted. The people count the days and eagerly expect the new supply. The grain grows very low and in most places it is pulled by hand instead of being cut with the sickle.

When the barley is harvested the wheat fields are becoming white and the grain is ripening, and the men are preparing their sickles and hiring extra laborers.

The disciples of Jesus first worked among the Jews, then among the Gentiles. The Jews were like the barley harvest but the greater harvest of wheat was to follow. While the disciples were converting the Jews, the Gentile world was preparing to accept the new gospel. The disciples need not be idle, for there was plenty of work to be done in getting ready for the conversion of the world.



SOWER AND REAPER REJOICING

And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. John 4 : 36.

Sowing is generally done by the owner of the field but the wheat is cut by hired reapers. When the fields are ready for harvest, every farmer hastens to hire laborers in order to gather and store his crops before the rainy season begins. It is not safe to leave the ripened fields of wheat uncut. The wheat raised represents the sole means of livelihood of the family. If anything should happen to it the family would be reduced to poverty. While the field is ripening, the owner thus suffers

anxiety. Older men often spend sleepless nights, fearing that an enemy might burn the field.

Harvest is an exciting season. There is much joy in every home when the new wheat furnishes bread, and the storehouses are replenished. The owner of the field supervises the work, and his wife and daughters bring cooked food to the field for the reapers. The reaper is just as happy as the owner of the harvest because he depends for his livelihood on the wages he gets, which are paid in wheat that furnishes bread for his family.



SOWING AND REAPING

And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. John 4 : 37.

This is an Aramaic expression, which refers to men who enter upon the labors of others. One who sows may die before the crop is ripe, and then the wheat is harvested by a relative or even a stranger who did not labor in the sowing. Or the ripened fields might be confiscated by enemies or suffer from some other disaster.

In many parts of the east, sowing is done by the owner of the land but the harvest is gathered by hired laborers. In the spring farmers find plenty of time to plant. In the summer the crops have to be gathered hastily for fear that they may be destroyed by fire or the wheat stolen. Additional laborers are therefore hired and their wages are paid in wheat. Jas. 5 : 4.

The field is the Jewish religion. The sowers are the prophets who proclaimed the Word of God and announced the coming of the Messiah. The disciples are the laborers who are ready to harvest what they had not sown. Jesus taught his disciples that in their work they were completing what the prophets had previously done. His Gospel was not the beginning of a new religion but the fulfilment of the promises which God had made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.



FATHER AND SON

Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise.

For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. John 5 : 19, 20.

Arts and handicrafts have been kept secret for long ages in most Oriental countries where the machine has not made its appearance. In this way the arts have been handed down from father to son. The secrets of blacksmith, coppersmith and silversmith are thus carried down from generation to generation.

When strangers desire to learn a trade or an art, they have to work for years without pay, so as to acquire skill in workmanship. The master does not reveal the secrets of his trade to his apprentices until they have served out their full time and proven to be worthy of his confidence and favor. Some apprentices who have not been loyal to their masters, leave their trades without knowing the secrets which give distinction to their art works and make them saleable. Such men cannot start in business for themselves, but must secure employment in other places in the hope of gaining the knowledge of trade secrets which they lack.

This is not so with the son who, from his childhood, is brought up under the care of his father. He eats with his father; works with him in the field and at the shop; and shares his life from the outset. The daughter imitates her mother and learns her occupation.

In a shop, one sees a father and his little boy working together. The father mixes formulas and finishes objects in the presence of his son. The apprentices and other workers are not allowed to see these processes. But the father teaches his son everything he knows and allows him to practice on objects that an apprentice is not allowed to touch. The father teaches his son with gentle-

ness and patience, hoping some day to hand over to him the family trade to be continued in every particular in the coming generation.

Jesus did not gain his knowledge from schools, rabbis or priests, but from his Father. The prophets and priests were selected and trained to learn the secrets of the kingdom of heaven which they did not understand for they were strangers and apprentices. Jesus was the Son, and he knew everything, not so much from the books but from his Father with whom he communed and who kept nothing from him. What he was doing, was therefore the work which the Father intended should be done. He and his Father were working in harmony and accord.



SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

John 5 : 39.

The Eastern text reads, "Examine the scriptures in which you trust that you have eternal life." The Scriptures are the highest standard of truth and morality because they are the Word of God. Treaties between nations, written or oral agreements between individuals might be disregarded and suspected, but the Word of the Scriptures has never been questioned. Cases which courts and judges cannot settle are decided by taking oaths on the Holy Scriptures. People are also blessed or cursed with the words of the Scriptures. The sacred words are eternal and good for all generations because they come from God who is eternal.

The reference here is to the Messianic promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jewish sacred literature is built upon this holy covenant which is the highest court of law. Jesus reminded the Jews of these promises which clearly bore witness to his mission. What he meant

was that if they doubted his words they were to examine the Scriptures which would finally decide the issue.



LOAVES AND FISHES

There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?

John 6 : 9.

When dough is made, a woman makes the sign of the cross over it with her finger as a token of blessing. She then says: "God increase it and let it be shared with strangers and the hungry." Eastern women call it *bork-tha*, which means blessing. Bread baked by women who are noted for piety and sincerity and who devote themselves to prayer and fasting is considered blessed. People believe the blessings of certain holy men and the pious hand cause the good leaven to multiply. Families of bad reputation are known as having bad leaven and bad bread. Some pious women are forehanded and always provide a sufficient food supply. They are noted for their ability to satisfy many unexpected guests. When food articles are handled, God's name is invoked and his abundant blessings are sought. Sheep likewise are blessed. The increase is expected through birth and God's protection is asked over the flock. Eastern people often say God has increased their substance. He has given them sheep and other wealth. (Gen. 24 : 25)

Restaurants and hotels are unknown. When men travel, enough bread is taken in bags to last through the entire journey, because bread cannot be procured on the road. The habit is so inborn that immigrants often carry bread with them from Turkey and Persia to the United States. On a short journey travelers carry as many as fifteen loaves between garments. Fish, cheese and other food stuffs are also carried. Nowhere today can a group of Eastern people be found on a journey without bread and food supplies.

While the caravan is on the road every man tries to

conserve his supply of bread. Some men pretend they are short of bread and blame the shortage on their wives. They use this pretense because while Easterners are generous in sharing their food at home, on the journey, the supply is limited and they try to conserve what they have by seeking to eat with others. Invitations to share, however, are given reluctantly. This all changes on the return journey. Now everybody becomes generous because it is contrary to Eastern custom to bring back stale bread which would have to be thrown to the birds or given to strangers. Those who had hitherto hidden their bread are now ready to share it with others. The men who had previously stated they did not have enough, suddenly display many loaves which they produce from their garments and bags. This looks like magic or even a miracle to the hungry.

Jesus went to seek a lonely place but he was followed by the large crowd. In accordance with custom, these travelers surely carried loaves of bread and fish. They did not know how long Jesus would stay nor how long they would be away from home. From the very start some of the men must have generously shared their bread. Others, less generous, saved their food supplies by seeking to eat with friends. They were afraid Jesus might stay a long time in the desert and they were fearful lest they would not have sufficient to last the time spent. If they did not have food, they could not remain as long as Jesus.

When Jesus decided to dismiss the crowds, some of those who had previously shared their bread generously had exhausted their supply and were almost famished. The disciples feared these might faint by the wayside but Jesus instructed his disciples to feed them. The disciples found a boy with five loaves of bread and two fishes in his garments. He was willing to share with the crowd. When he did this, others who had concealed their bread and now realizing Jesus had finished preaching and that they were about to return home, produced the food saved in their garments and bags and offered it to the hungry crowd. Jesus blessed them and his blessing no doubt in-

creased the bread so that they were all satisfied. There was not only enough to go around but an abundance remained. The Gospel does not state how the bread was produced nor how it was increased but satisfying the hunger of this huge crowd with the means at hand was a miracle. Easterners believe men of God can increase the supplies of bread but how this is done, no one pretends to know. They assign the cause to God from whom everything comes and in whose mind everything exists before it is accomplished.

To convert selfish people into unselfish givers is regarded as a miracle. A poor Easterner prays to God for food or wealth. He expects God will bless what he has. He expects God to soften the hearts of the rich to contribute to his relief. No doubt but Jesus had the power to increase the bread.

The Christian gospel throughout centuries has wrought miracles and wonders. Men and women have been willing not only to share and to give liberally but to sacrifice even their lives for the sake of the Gospel. Matt. 14 : 7; Mark 6 : 38; Luke 9 : 13.



WALKING ON THE SEA

So when they had rowed about five and twenty or thirty furlongs, they see Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing nigh unto the ship: and they were afraid. John 6 : 19.

According to Aramaic style of speech, walking *on* the sea means walking *by* the sea or *along* the shore. The word *al* has many meanings, such as enter, on, against,

attack, by, rape, chase, because. Its usage as a noun, preposition, verb or adverb is very confusing when translated into another language. Psalm 137 : 1 reads in Aramaic, *al nahrawatha d-Babel, taman eteven wawkhen*, which literally means "on the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept." It is correctly rendered in the King James version, "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, . . ." When reference is made to the surface of the water, the Aramaic word *ahey*, which means face, is used. This is the same as the Hebrew word *paney* used in Genesis 1 : 2, "upon the face of the waters." *Ahey* does not occur in the Gospels.

The writer of this Gospel used the word *al*, which here means on or by, to imply that Jesus walked *by* the sea. Even today Assyrians say *ezal al yama*, he has gone to the sea; or *khader al yama*, walking along the shore, but if translated literally both would mean, on the sea. When a man crosses a river or sea, in Aramaic it is said, he flew to the other side. He took the sheep on the water, means, he took the sheep to water to drink.

The Eastern Text states Jesus left Capernaum with his disciples for the port of Tiberias. Both cities are on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. The incident of the crossing, according to the King James version, is due to mistranslation of the Aramaic word *evra*, landing place, derived from the word *avar*, to cross. This would place Tiberias on the opposite side of the sea which is not its correct location. Jesus and his disciples left Capernaum in the boat for the port of Tiberias. After feeding the people, he instructed his disciples to return by boat to Capernaum while he retired to the mountain. The Gospel writer does not give any reason why Jesus walked on the sea rather than along the coast which latter was more probable under the circumstances. Had he been at Gadara, on the opposite shore, he would doubtless have walked on the water. This question has nothing to do with the divinity of Jesus. He certainly had the power and would have used it if necessary. The boat was headed towards Capernaum. When the disciples had rowed about twenty-five or thirty furlongs, they saw Jesus walking

al yama literally, on the sea, but properly translated, by the sea. When he drew nearer to the water they became afraid, thinking he might be an angel or a spirit. Easterners believe angels attack men in the darkness of the night if they are by the water. Today no man crosses a stream or a river after nightfall without saying a prayer or calling upon God's name. Jesus promptly spoke to them, "It is I, be not afraid." Verse 21 clearly indicates they wanted to receive Jesus into the boat but it reached the landing place before they could take him in.

To explain this comment, a great deal depends upon visualizing the position and location of Tiberias and Capernaum. The map on the fly leaf shows clearly the Sea of Galilee and the cities of Tiberias and Capernaum, near to each other on the western shore of the Sea, Tiberias south of Capernaum. It is easier and quicker to walk from Tiberias to Capernaum than to row on the water. Jesus did not go with his disciples by boat because he wished to avoid the excited crowd, awaiting him at Capernaum, who wanted to make him a king by force.

The Gospels of Matthew and Mark also speak of Jesus walking on the water. I believe on this occasion Jesus did walk on the water because here there was a necessity or reason as can be readily seen by reference to Matthew 14 : 22-33 and Mark 6 : 45 : 51.

Still and clear water represent light and happiness. Troubled water means doubt, fear and disaster to come. Jesus' disciples were disturbed. They wondered how Jesus could be proclaimed a king without a revolution. Jesus, through his appearance, strengthened them. No doubt the disciples were in some difficulty which was solved by the presence of Jesus. In view of this translation of the Eastern Text and the geographical location of Tiberias, there was no need for Jesus to cross the sea.

Walking on the water is not a greater miracle than healing the sick, opening the eyes of the blind, raising the dead or changing human hearts. Jesus promised his followers would do greater things.



MANNA

Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. John 6 : 31.

Manna is derived from the Aramaic word *Mann-ho*, meaning, what is it? This name was given to a desert food which the Hebrews found in the wilderness and had never before seen. They found that it was a kind of edible food, sweet to the taste like honey, but they wondered where it came from, and what was its name. That was why they gave it the name of *manna*, what is it?

Manna falls in the early morning on the ground just like dew. It rests on the leaves of the tamarisk plant which is still found in the Arabian desert and other parts of the East. It is gathered and eaten by the natives as well as by stranded travelers.

Manna and quails were supplied by God to the Hebrews during their wanderings in the wilderness. (Exod. 16 : 13ff; Num. 11 : 31). The Bible states that the quails were found lying high on the ground. This is an Aramaic way of saying that they were abundant as they still are, and easily caught in the Arabian desert and used by the nomads for food and also sold in the cities.

When anything in the East is easily accomplished, it is said, it is cooked, ready to be eaten. When food is abundant, it is said, the food is knee-deep. No doubt this was a miracle which God performed in order to supply the hungry Hebrews in the desert, but the writers of the Books of Moses used Aramaic terms in describing the incidents which took place. It is interesting to know that people in the desert continue to speak pure Aramaic, the language which their fathers brought from Assyria until after their return to Palestine from Egypt. The word *Mann-ho* is still used by the Assyrians and manna is still gathered and eaten by the people.



THE BREAD OF LIFE

And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. John 6 : 35.

No matter how abundantly other food is offered, bread is the main food and essential to an eastern meal. While a family having other food but no bread is considered poor, the men of other families become famous and are spoken of highly because of their plentiful bread. Very little is known about the raising of vegetables and when the wheat crops fail, the people face starvation.

To Easterners bread is sacred. They take oaths by touching and kissing it. Bread is a sacred bond between friends and the sign of intimate relationship. It is often said "I have eaten his bread. I will die for him." Enemies are reconciled by breaking bread together. Bread is also the bond of protection. When a man takes refuge in another's house and eats his bread, the owner of that house must defend his guest at any cost, even with his life.

Jesus was the sacred bond between God and man. He was the true bread, the bread of the spirit, because he offered his life as spiritual food and for an everlasting covenant. No bond is sacred without him. No earthly bread is holier than his body. He is the bread of life and the truth and those who eat never hunger nor lack in understanding.



JESUS' FLESH AND BLOOD

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. John 6 : 53.

Among Semitic people who speak northern Aramaic, one often hears "I have eaten my body and drunk my blood." This means the speaker has worked to the point of exhaustion. Another common saying is "I have

eaten the body of my dead people" and means "I have labored under difficulties." "While working I saw my dead folk" refers to the suffering and danger to which the speaker was exposed. Such idiomatic expressions were not common in Chaldean Aramaic which the people of Judea spoke. They could not be understood when taken literally as it was not understood in this instance. This was the reason, also, why Nicodemus did not understand concerning the new birth. (John 3 : 14)

Such expressions were used by the Galilean Jews when they referred to the historic struggles of their people for the temple and sacred traditions which Jesus vigorously attacked. Jesus insisted these struggles and achievements were in vain because they were not spiritually and politically liberated. The Jews could secure this liberty only as they identified themselves with him in sacrifice. This is what he meant by eating his flesh and drinking his blood and thereby taking upon themselves his sufferings and responsibilities to bring about not only their salvation but also that of the whole world. It is against the law for a Jew to eat blood. (Lev. 3 : 7; Deut. 12 : 16)

The words of Jesus were the spiritual food the world has always needed because they contain life and light. The flesh of the lamb which was eaten in Egypt and the water which Moses brought forth from the rock had not helped to regenerate the people. The words of Jesus were to displace Jewish ceremonies and doctrines. Hungry humanity was offered a new and lasting food.



QUALITY OF SPIRIT

It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.
John 6 : 63.

The Eastern text makes this verse clear, "The words I speak to you are spirit and life, the body is of no account."

Jesus' words were spirit and the spirit is life because

it is eternal. The body is of no account because it is a manifestation of matter. If our earth should move several million miles towards the sun, the nature and form of matter would undergo radical change.

The body is organized material substance. Life is the divine spark of God in the body. Man's value is not estimated by physical appearance, such as beauty, strength and flesh, but by the quality of spirit he possesses because it is the spirit that gives life.

Jesus does not imply we should not take care of the body which is the temple of the spirit. He means we should be more concerned about our spiritual life because it is more important.



THE EDUCATION OF JESUS

Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught.

And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? John 7 : 15.

Public schools and colleges were unknown in the East until the coming of Christian missionaries. Education consisted almost exclusively of the study of the sacred literature. In the Church, mosque and synagogue men and boys sit around the book and read in turn. A few of exceptional merit are trained more fully by the priests and rabbis. Some of them acquire an education by constant attendance at the religious services, where they commit to memory portions of the Scriptures and the liturgy. Some men know the writings by heart but cannot read them. There are some bishops and priests even today who are able to read but who cannot write. In fact in the Orient, writing is an art all by itself, and the labor of it is done by professional scribes who are recruited from the ranks of the poor.

Reading and writing are unpopular among the rich. The missionaries in the early days had difficulty in gaining the consent of rich parents to send their boys to

school. This is largely because until recent times education was of no value for business and other purposes. Banks and commercial houses were unknown.

No doubt Jesus had acquired an oral education just as Easterners do today, but he also knew how to read. This does not necessarily imply that he was educated for the priesthood. He read Aramaic his native tongue and also Hebrew. This explains the surprise of the Jews who could not understand how one with a limited educational equipment had such a grasp of the Scriptures. Jesus had an inner understanding of the sacred literature because he had studied it from a spiritual point of view. He did not take things literally. Not having been educated under the strict care of rabbis and priests his mind was free from the traditions of the elders.



WATER FLOWING FROM THE BELLY

He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. John 7 : 38.

Water is abundant in Europe and America but it is scarce in the Holy Land. Modern civilization, science and technique have entirely eliminated the fear of the shortage of water in occidental countries, but in the east where pipe lines and reservoirs are unknown, water is still a very acute problem.

During the arid summer months most of the brooks dry and the water supply is diminished; the land is parched with heat and looks like a desert. Many villages depend for their water supplies on wells but during droughts they also dry up and people have to carry water from long distances. Women walk miles carrying on their heads and backs scanty supplies of water. Even though water is a natural product, at times it has to be apportioned in small quantities to people. The people often go to bed thirsty and dream of drinking water from springs. Water will flow "from their bellies," means that they will never be thirsty again. Easterners often say "I am so

thirsty that I can dry a river," and again, "My thirst is so quenched that I feel as if a river of water is flowing within me."

The reference here is to the teaching of Jesus. The truth would be revealed so clearly that men would no longer seek the wisdom of the scribes and priests, whose knowledge was limited and which was often dried out as the springs in the summer. The new teaching was to make life easier and happier, and inspire hopes for the life hereafter.



WRITING ON THE GROUND

This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not.

John 8 : 6.

Scratching the ground is a common oriental custom. During divans and conferences, men either play with a string of amber beads which they hold in their hands, or they tear apart a piece of wood with their nails or with a knife. Others finger objects near them. Great thinkers, judges and wise men, while listening to debates and trying to reach a decision, bend down and scratch the floor with their forefinger, making geometrical lines and crossing them in the form of a chess board but leaving no imprint. They would do this even if they were sitting on a rug or on a rock. To a stranger it might seem that the men were busy writing or doing something else and not attentive; but in reality they are closely absorbed in attentive thought.

When the men were accusing the woman of adultery, Jesus bent down and began to draw with his finger. The whole situation was embarrassing. He was thinking out an answer and listening to what the woman's accusers were saying. He did not write anything on the ground, nor could the people have read it if he had. It would be hard to write on the rough floor of an oriental house and

most easterners are illiterate. These men knew that Jesus was a prophet and they were afraid that he might expose the men who had sinned with the woman, and who would suffer the same punishment as the woman, according to Jewish law.



SHEOL AND SUICIDE

Then said the Jews, Will he kill himself? because he saith, Whither I go, ye cannot come. John 8 : 22.

It is an ancient belief that when a man commits suicide, he is immediately cut off from this world and from the world hereafter. His soul goes to sheol (hades), a place of silence outside the jurisdiction of God. It is said that the souls which go to sheol remain there forever. The Jews believed that God had no power over sheol. This belief is still upheld in most eastern countries, and hence easterners do not commit suicide. There are less suicides in all the near east than in one city in America.

Jesus told the Jews that he was going to a place where they could not come. They thought that this place might be sheol because the only way to get there was by taking one's own life. They believed they were the chosen people of God, who go to Heaven. If Jesus meant Heaven, they would certainly find him there, but as Jesus was a heretic in their estimation, they certainly did not expect to see him there.



JESUS IS TRUE

I have many things to say and to judge of you: but he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him. John 8 : 26.

Messengers are generally judged by those who send them. If the sender is a man of reputation, then his messenger is highly respected and his words are not suspected. An eastern messenger represents his lord, and he

is instructed to speak and act according to his lord's wishes and on his behalf. The word *sharira* means true and also sincere. Jesus is proving that he is sincere just like his Father. The Jews believed that God was true but they doubted that Jesus was his messenger.

In his discourses Jesus always tried to impress his audience that he was sent by God, and that he and God were of one accord. Easterners often say "What I am saying is true, just as God is true."



YOU SHALL KNOW THE TRUTH

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. John 8 : 32.

The Aramaic word for truth is *shrara*, derived from *sharar* to be firm, sincere and truthful. When a man is doubtful of his faith, he has no grasp on it. He is often shaken and his faith weakened, but when a man understands the truth he has a strong hold on it. His faith becomes firmer and his sincerity is strongly manifested because he knows what he believes and that what he believes is true.

The Jews had the scriptures but they did not know the truth. The sacred writings were only available to high priests and doctors of law. The public did not know what the scriptures contained. All that they heard in the synagogue was the traditions of the elders who interpreted the scriptures in the way that suited them. The sacred writings were however soon to become common. The new religion was to expound an authentic theology and interpretation and to reveal the inner truth which the scriptures contained. The sacred scrolls which were locked in vaults were soon to be published and their words heard throughout the world. People would be freed from false interpretations, false doctrines and bondage. They were to read the scriptures and to understand their inner meaning under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.



THE SAMARITANS

Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?

John 8 : 48.

The Samaritans were a mixed population made up of people which the king of Assyria had settled in Samaria in place of the ten tribes of Israel in 722 B.C. They were of the same stock as the people of Galilee, except that the Samaritans adhered more closely to the customs which their ancestors brought from Assyria. They adopted the Jewish faith in part but they carried on their own traditions and worship. (2 Kings 17 : 29.)

The people whom the Assyrian king brought from countries beyond the Euphrates river were of diverse faiths. It is very likely that the Assyrian authorities settled them in groups by themselves. At the time of Jesus the Jews despised the Samaritans more than the Galileans. Even though they had accepted the five books of Moses, the Jews looked upon them as pagans. The Samaritans resembled the Assyrians more than any other people in Palestine. They were tall, strong and warriors like the Assyrians, as their vanishing descendants are today.

They accepted the Pentateuch because this was the only sacred literature of Israel, oral or written, before the division of the kingdom. They probably rejected the other parts of the Old Testament for political reasons. The books of the Prophets contain condemnations of the Assyrian Empire, and the books of Kings and Chronicles are largely against the northern kingdom and the kings of Samaria. The Samaritans thought it unwise to use such writings against their own people as sacred literature. Then again they had settled in Samaria the capital of the northern kingdom and they followed the customs and traditions of the land as established by Jeroboam and the kings of Israel. They worshipped at the sacred shrines on Mt. Gerizim and other high places which had been abandoned by the ten tribes. This custom of reviv-

ing old worship at abandoned shrines still continues. For instance, Mohammedans have converted Greek and Nestorian churches into mosques, and carry on old traditions.

In this verse Jesus was called a Samaritan in scorn because Nazareth was in the province of Samaria and a part of the northern kingdom. The Samaritans moreover were the traditional enemies of the Jews because their ancestors had come from Assyria.

When Nehemiah and other elders of Judah were building the walls of Jerusalem and the Temple, the Galileans and the Samaritans came down to Jerusalem and offered to help rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem, stating that, since their forefathers were brought from Assyria into Galilee, they had been worshipping Jehovah, the God of the land, and sacrificed to him. The leaders of the Jews rejected this offer on the ground that the Galileans and Samaritans, even though they worshipped the Jewish God, were descendants of the early Assyrian invaders. (Ezra 4 : 1, 2). They repudiated their claims to belong to the Jewish race. This refusal widened the breach and increased the enmity between the people of the north and the south. Thus the Galileans and the Jews hated each other bitterly. This hatred continued to the day of Jesus. The Jews refused to eat or to mix with Galileans. On the other hand, the Galileans had no use for the ceremonial traditions of the elders, such as washing of hands and pots, for these had become substitutes for true worship. This feeling was shared by Jesus and his disciples who were Galileans. Matt. 10 : 5; Luke 10 : 33; John 4 : 9.



THE AGE OF JESUS

Then said the Jews unto him, Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham? John 8 : 57.

When an easterner reaches the age of fifty, he is considered an old man and he sits in the Council of the Elders. His age is supposed to give him wisdom and his advice is sought by the people who regard him as an

authority on what has happened in the past. He tells them what he saw and heard when he was a young man. On the other hand, a young man however learned he may be, is not consulted about social or religious matters. The elders are the only authorities on such questions.

"You are not yet fifty" is an oriental saying, which means, you are a young man, probably thirty or thirty-five. No birth records are kept and the age of people has to be guessed. The Jews took literally what Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day". They thought that what he meant was that he had lived in the flesh at the time of Abraham but he referred to the Messianic promises made by God to Abraham. He, himself, was the promise, and the promise was made to Eve before Abraham was born, that her seed shall bruise the head of the serpent. (Genesis 3 : 15).



A BLIND MAN HEALED

And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?

John 9 : 2.

Institutions for the blind are still unknown in the ancient lands. Destitute blind men support themselves by labor or begging. Some few are taught to weave, grind wheat or do other manual work but most of the blind prefer to beg rather than work. Begging is a professional occupation. Most Easterners would give to a blind or lame person rather than to a professional beggar who is physically fit. Some men, even though not in need, successfully beg by pretending to be blind. This deception reacts against those who are actually born blind. Men and women, passing through the market places, are often deceived by men who pretend to be blind, and are thus reluctant to believe a person is really blind. Some beggars are totally blind, some only partially so, others just pretend to be blind. It is difficult to believe a person is blind when you find supposedly blind people

gambling and quarreling or when, if wrong change is given, the blind person follows shouting curses and demanding the right change.

Jesus healed this man actually born blind. The Pharisees did not believe because religious men are usually the first victims of false blind persons. On the way to the temple, they had so often been deceived by men who sat on corners, weeping, and quoting scripture while asking alms. This explains why the Pharisees were reluctant to believe this particular man was blind so they went to his father and mother but despite their confirmation, they would hardly believe it.

To the disciple who asked whose fault it was that this man was born blind, Jesus explained no one was to blame but in order that God might be glorified, he healed the man. This man was not created blind just so Jesus could heal him. Other men, blind through their own fault, needed healing also but this man was fortunate to be at hand so Jesus healed him that God's name would be glorified. Easterners believe children are stricken on account of curses placed on the parents or that the parents may have broken certain religious laws. According to the eastern laws, children pay for the sins of their parents.

It is just as difficult today for people to believe such miracles because they have been deceived before and now have lost faith. No one questions a doctor's ability or healing power because for years the people have had more faith in medicine than reliance on God.



THE WORKS OF GOD

Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. John 9 : 3.

The correct translation of this verse is, "Neither did he sin nor his parents. But that the works of God might be seen in him, I must do the works of him who sent me while it is day". The second part of the third

verse and the first part of the fourth verse should go together. No doubt the error was due to careless copying and the change, changed the meaning of the verse. When the gospels were written, punctuation and paragraphing were unknown. Words were written close together to save space.

The man was not created blind in order that Jesus might heal him. This would have been unfair to the man. There were many other ways that Jesus could show his miraculous power. The meeting of the blind man was incidental and providential, just as when Jesus met the son of the widow and raised him. Jesus healed the blind man so that the works of God might be seen in him, and that he might carry out his mission of mercy as he had the opportunity.



WORSHIPPING JESUS

He answered and said, Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?

And Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.

And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him.

John 9 : 36, 37, 38.

The Aramaic word *sagad*, worship, also means to bend or to kneel down. Easterners in greeting each other generally bow the head or bend down. When a ruler or holy man is greeted, the people kneel before him. "He worshipped him" does not imply that he worshipped Jesus as one who worshipped God. Such an act would have been regarded as sacrilegious and a breach of the first commandment in the eyes of the Jews and the man might have been stoned. But he knelt before him in token of homage and gratitude. This is also a sign of self-surrender and loyalty. The blind man worshipped Jesus in acknowledgment of his divine power and in appreciation of his compassion on him in opening his eyes. He had no knowledge of the claims of Jesus nor was he interested in his teachings, but he was convinced by the miracle

performed that he must be a holy man and one empowered by God.



SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS

And Jesus said, For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind. John 9 : 39.

It is common in the East to call one blind who makes mistakes. The reference here is to the Pharisees, scribes and priests. They were the learned men and guardians of religion and law. But so far as spiritual understanding was concerned they were blind. They took everything literally and were blinded by the traditions which had supplanted the Scriptures. These teachings had blurred their vision and their thoughts could not sink deeper than the traditional teachings. The illiterate whom the learned had considered ignorant and blind could more readily be taught to see because they were not bound by traditions. Their eyes were to be opened by the new teaching which explained the Scriptures for the first time. These men were blind through ignorance through no fault of their own. The Pharisees were spiritually blind, and their sin was greater because they could see and read but they were not willing to understand and accept the true teaching of the Scriptures, and so they were held accountable and considered blameworthy.



HIS OWN SHEEP

To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. John 10 : 3.

Every shepherd knows his own sheep and calls them by their names. A good shepherd also knows the sheep of his neighbors. Sheep are named and bear the ear mark

of their owners. A shepherd who takes care of a large flock must know the marks of all the owners whose sheep are entrusted to his keeping. When a shepherd approaches the fold, his own sheep promptly recognize his voice and bleat for him. He responds by calling the choice sheep by their names, and when he leads them to the pasture his own sheep follow him, especially because he feeds them with salt.

This parable was spoken against the Pharisees and others who did not belong to the fold of Jesus and who did not recognize his voice. He knew their mark but they were not his and so they did not follow him.



THE DOOR OF THE SHEEP

Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. John 10 : 7.

There are two kinds of sheep folds. One is a large square building covered with beams, branches of trees and a layer of straw and earth. This is used during the winter for the sheep. In the spring, summer and autumn, the sheep of the whole town are kept in a large, square fold without a roof. There are walls around this fold to protect the sheep from wolves, bears and thieves, and to keep them from going astray. This enclosure has a single entrance similar to the winter fold but without a door. After the sheep are brought in for the night, the shepherd sleeps at the entrance so that he could be awakened by the approach of a thief or a wild animal. No one is allowed to enter this fold except the owners of the sheep.

Jesus used this allegory as an illustration of himself as the door of the sheep. He meant that he was the protector and guardian of the Jewish people in particular and of all other people in general. No man could enter his fold without his knowledge, and no man could live in security and peace without his guardianship.



THE GOOD SHEPHERD

I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.
John 10 : 11.

In the Orient there are two kinds of shepherd—the owners of the sheep, and the hired shepherds. Among Semites one of the highest occupations is that of a shepherd. This is because for untold generations, a livelihood was made from the produce of the sheep. The highest desire of many a woman is to see her son become a shepherd. In cases where men have no male children, a strange shepherd is hired for a stipulated wage and food.

The shepherd who is the owner of the sheep not only loves them but he also lays down his life for them. When robbers and wild animals attack the sheep he fights to the end for the safety of his flock. During attacks by bandits, shepherds are killed and the sheep taken away. It is not so with the hired shepherds. When they see an enemy approaching they leave the sheep in the mountain or field and flee. Some hired shepherds would not try to rescue sheep from wolves or bears. They would rather see a score of sheep destroyed than suffer injury themselves. David was a true shepherd because he fed his father's sheep. When they were attacked by a bear and lion he slew both animals. (I Sam. 17 : 34.)

Some of the prophets were hired shepherds. During conflicts and national calamities they deserted the people and fled. The elders were the self-constituted shepherds of the people. Their sole interest was in the revenues they were receiving. They were more interested in the security of their office than in the welfare of the nation. Jesus was the true shepherd. He worked without wages and honors and was ready to give his life for the people who were children of his father.



SITTING AT THE FEET

Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.

John 11 : 32.

When Easterners are entertained, they sit on a quilt or a mattress on the floor, and have pillows and cushions placed behind them on which to recline. The best place in the center is given to the honored guest. People generally fold their feet under them, while eating. After the meal, if tired, they stretch their feet out.

Servants and ordinary men cannot sit with guests but sit in front of them near their feet, kneeling on one knee and talking to the guests. On some occasions cases are brought up before the guests for discussion and arbitration. Men and sometimes women kneel down at the feet of the honored guest and plead for mercy. When poor men or women come in to present their case, or to salute the honored guest, they first take off their shoes, and then go where the honored guest is seated and bow before him. If he happens to be a holy man, they kiss his hand, his knee, or his feet. While pleading their case, they often say "I throw myself at your feet", which means, I am at your mercy. Then they bow down to the ground, lay hold of the feet and continue to present their case. Matt. 18 : 29; Mark 5 : 22; Luke 7 : 28.



JESUS WEPT

Jesus wept.

John 11 : 35.

The Eastern text reads "was greatly disturbed", that is, he was moved by the grief of the sorrow-stricken sisters, and their relatives and friends. The Aramaic word *etzi*, moved, here means disturbed. It refers to the change of expression on the face. Easterners are emotional and

are easily stirred at funerals. They cannot help weeping when others weep. Even the priests give way to tears.

At first Jesus was calm in trying to encourage the sisters, by telling them that their brother was not dead and that he would rise again. But when he was confronted by a large crowd of mourners, he could not restrain his emotion. Tears streamed from his eyes, and his countenance changed, not only expressing sorrow but also indicating the hopelessness of the situation.

This was really not the case. He was not weeping because Lazarus was dead and he could not raise him. An Oriental doctor weeps only when he sees that there is no hope for the recovery of his patient. The heart of Jesus was moved to sadness by the wailing of the mourners who regarded death as a final calamity because they had no hope in God's power. The popular belief about the weeping of Jesus was therefore incorrect for he was soon to bring Lazarus back to life.



THE FEAR OF THE ROMANS

*If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him:
and the Romans shall come and take away both our place
and nation.*

John 11 : 48.

The eastern text reads "and the Romans will come and take over both our country and our people". That is to say, they will put an end to home rule in Palestine and make Judaea a Roman province like the provinces in Asia Minor and Syria, which were completely governed by Rome and whose people were citizens of the Roman Empire.

Judaea was under Rome but the Jews still maintained a restricted autonomy. They were granted certain political rights and complete religious liberty, which they were able to save from the wreckage of the Hasmonaeon dynasty. The Romans appointed the kings over Judaea but they had first to get the approval of the Jews. These

rights and privileges were seldom bestowed on other races by the Roman Caesars and the Jews were very careful not to lose them. On the other hand, seditions and revolutions would give Rome an excuse for cancelling this freedom. This is why the Pharisees were afraid of Jesus' teaching which sounded revolutionary and communistic, and which might cause dissatisfaction and uprising among the misruled and heavily taxed subjects of Palestine. What concerned them was the security of their social and political position and not the welfare of the people.



THE SYRIANS

And there were certain Greeks among them, that came up to worship at the feast: John 12 : 20.

The Eastern text reads *Ammey* which means Gentiles, that is Idumaeans, Syrians and other neighboring peoples. The Aramaic word for Greeks is *Yonaye*. This word is not used in the Eastern text, except in the inscription on the cross. The people here mentioned were probably Assyrians who were sent by Abgarus, king of Edessa, to invite Jesus to visit that city. A document relative to the visit of these men and the exchange of correspondence between Jesus and King Abgarus was discovered by Eusebius about 400 A.D. A copy is at the Vatican library. Jesus in his reply to Abgarus promised to send one of his disciples to Edessa after his resurrection. According to the twenty-third verse, Jesus answered them saying "The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified". He spoke of his death and resurrection. In his letter to Abgarus he also says that he must die. These emissaries of the Assyrian king offered him protection from the Jews and an invitation to his kingdom.



THE LORD AND HIS SERVANTS

If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour. John 12 : 26.

When Easterners entertain a nobleman his servants and friends are also included. The honorable guest and his servants sit down at meals together, although more attention is paid to the master than to his servants. Special dishes are prepared for him. Fruit and other delicacies are offered only to him but he passes them around among his servants. An Easterner would be offended if his servants were not treated with due homage appropriate to him. Some men would refuse the hospitality and comfort of a house if their servants were not provided in like manner. At night some of the guests and their servants sleep on the floor in the same room, and the next morning their servants accompany them wherever they are invited.

Jesus assured his disciples of his abiding presence. He was not leaving them but he was going to heaven to prepare a place for them. Wherever he would be, they also would be with him. They had left everything to follow him and he would not leave them helpless. They were to share in his heavenly kingdom and sit around him on the twelve thrones of Israel.



THE PRAYER OF JESUS

Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. John 12 : 28.

Jesus has been glorified. His father has endowed him with powers. He has entrusted everything into his hands, just as a father entrusts his possessions to his son. Jesus had raised the dead and opened the eyes of the

blind. He had received honor and praise from the people. He was acclaimed a king and the deliverer of Israel. Multitudes followed him from town to town because of his popularity. Now he was to be rejected and humiliated but the sudden disappointment and sadness which would befall them would turn into joy. He was to be further glorified by his resurrection and ascension into heaven. Humanity was to share in this glory. Jesus was to overcome death and open a new way to immortality.



THE SUFFERING MESSIAH

The people answered him, We have heard out of the law that Christ abideth for ever: and how sayest thou, The Son of man must be lifted up? who is this Son of man?

John 12 : 34.

According to Jewish traditional interpretation of the Scriptures, the Messiah was to restore the glorious Davidic kingdom, and establish a monarchy which was to surpass in wealth and power the realms of Babylon, Assyria and Persia. Most of the prophets of Israel predicted the rise of such a strong political leader as a means of establishing the kingdom of God on earth. In the later prophecies however, the whole Messianic picture was changed. The prophecies were suddenly shifted from that of an earthly ruler to a suffering servant, and from that of a welcome and long expected Messiah to a rejected Christ. (Compare Isaiah 11 : 53). This was because the prophets foresaw that the Jews, a small nation, could never overthrow the stronger nations and attain to political supremacy. But they were destined to exercise a spiritual influence over the whole world.

In accordance with these prophecies, Jesus invariably proclaimed that the Messianic kingdom, "the kingdom of God, was at hand." His announcement of the Messianic reign induced people to seize him to make him a king by

force. His early ministry was largely confined to this aspect of prophecy and to the political restoration of Israel. Then he suddenly shifted his policy and predicted his departure to the holy city, not to be crowned as a king but to be betrayed and crucified. The long overdue political kingdom turned out to be a spiritual kingdom, and the death of Jesus was the only means to establish this spiritual reign on earth. By his death Jesus would save not only Israel but the whole world. The political salvation of Israel depended on the spiritual salvation of the world. The later prophets were aware of this. They saw great kingdoms rising and falling. The Davidic kingdom had also disappeared. A spiritual kingdom was the only means of the salvation of the world. And this could not be realized without the death and crucifixion of the Prince of Peace.



WALK IN THE LIGHT

Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you: for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. John 12 : 35.

Where electricity is unknown work and travel are done during the day, and the people rest when it is dark. In emergencies some people work and travel at night and take the risk of accidents and other mishaps which take place in the darkness.

Jesus spoke of his departure. He had been as a light to his disciples. He had explained the Scriptures to them. He had revealed the things which were hidden from the foundation of the world. Now this light was to disappear for a while. Darkness would soon settle everywhere. Temptation would overtake his followers. The sun was however to rise again and its golden rays to penetrate the uttermost corners of the world.

Jesus wanted his disciples to use every opportunity to understand these things while he was with them. The days of his trial and crucifixion were approaching. Some of his followers had already left him in disappointment. The others were also soon to desert him. These men could not understand the Scriptures. They could not believe that the Messiah was to suffer. In this critical period Jesus concentrated all his thought upon his disciples to show them out of the Scriptures that the Messiah had to die in order to rise again in glory.



THEY HAVE BECOME BLIND

He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them.
John 12 : 40.

The Aramaic word *awaro* is the third person plural passive tense of the word *awar*, and means "they have become blind". The Greek translator confused this word with *awar* the third person singular, active tense, "he made them blind". This mistake was doubtless due to the translator's unfamiliarity with Aramaic or to the mutilated condition of the manuscript which he used. The Aramaic reads, "Their eyes have become blind."

When Easterners lose their interest in religion they are called blind. Wealth and luxury close their eyes to spiritual needs. Selfishness and greed dominate their hearts. They oppress the poor and weak. All who are affected by such blindness lose their spiritual sight. They cannot therefore think of God, love and justice. This misfortune was not brought on them by God, as the King James version renders it, but through their own heedlessness. They were morally guilty and to be restored to sight they had to seek divine forgiveness.



BETRAYAL OF FRIENDSHIP

I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. John 13 : 18.

To eat bread and salt with a man and later betray him is the worst breach of etiquette. Most easterners refuse to eat bread in the homes of their enemies from whom they seek vengeance or are not on good terms. If they once eat bread and salt, they have to forget all their differences and in time of trouble lay down their lives for each other.

"Raised his feet against me" means he has revolted against me and is ready to fight me. Easterners fight with their feet and kick each other and use their fists to strike each other. Once the enemy is fallen down he is trodden under heel until he becomes helpless and unconscious.

Judas was in open revolt against his master. He had broken bread with him for years, but now he was ready to betray him and see him mocked, scourged and crucified. It was not only a breach of discipleship but of a long established eastern tradition.



SIMON WINKING AT JOHN

Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. John 13 : 24.

Oriental guests and disciples are generally shy and quiet in the presence of a nobleman or a holy man. On such occasions they keep silent and the conversation is carried on by the master and his honorable guests. The other guests merely listen or they exchange thoughts and ask or suggest questions by winking their eyes. Every move of an eye means something. Thus questions and

answers are easily communicated. The Eastern text more correctly reads that Peter winked at John.

During the last supper Peter was not seated near Jesus. He could not wait until the supper was over and he wanted to know at once who was to betray the Master. But Jesus did not want all the disciples to know who this was to be. It would have caused trouble and perhaps a rift in the ranks. Peter therefore winked at John who was sitting near Jesus to ask him who was the traitor. Jesus indicated the man by dipping a sop in the dish and giving it to him. John immediately knew him and later he told Peter. Probably this is why Peter took a sword with him into the garden. The other disciples were unaware of what was going to happen nor did they suspect Judas.



THE HEAVENLY HOME

In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

John 14 : 2.

As modern construction is unknown in the east, shortage of houses is a problem. Houses are always crowded because many members of the families continue to live together and they share their dwellings with strangers. Houses in the East are usually one story buildings and during the summer season people sleep on the roof. In the winter travellers and strangers who find no lodging usually sleep in stables and caves. Until recent days in Palestine and Syria housing conditions were always bad. The lack of space and overcrowded houses caused unsanitary conditions often resulting in leprosy. This is true to-day in parts of the east untouched by western civilization.

One of the highest desires of an oriental family is to have a home of their own. One can find food and clothing but it is very hard to find a dwelling place. There is

nothing more alluring than when a lord promises his servants a dwelling place.

Jesus was soon to leave his disciples. While they were with him, they were cared for and their needs met. They were afraid that after he had left them they would be destitute and without a home. Jesus assured them of a heavenly habitation. Even though their earthly expectations of a home and luxuries had come to an end, their aspiration for comfort and fame would be granted in the life hereafter. In his Father's house there were many rooms and comforts. Fears, worries and suffering were soon to vanish, and the disciples were to be inheritors of the heavenly kingdom and its eternal glory and peace.



TO PREPARE A PLACE

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.

John 14 : 3.

Migrations are always preceded by an advance party of one or two experienced men who are sent in search of a place as a temporary or permanent settlement. Among sheep raising people men are sent in search of green pastures and water for the flocks. No one would venture to leave his town or his pasture without the assurance of something better.

The men thus sent are empowered by the tribe to negotiate and make written or oral treaties with the people among whom they are to dwell. Houses, fields, seed and other necessities are provided in advance for the newcomers. The natives, among whom they are to dwell, are well informed about the immigrants and are ready to receive them with open arms.

The death of Jesus was to open a new way to immortality, and prepare an everlasting home for his followers. In those days, death was considered an ending. The souls of the departed ones went to the land of the unknown.

Only a few believed in the resurrection. Jesus' death was a departure from this life into eternal life. His followers were not to go down to Sheol (Hades) but they were to follow him into his everlasting kingdom, which he had gone ahead to prepare for them. The assurance of this Kingdom came to them after the triumphant resurrection and ascension of Jesus. His disciples followed in his steps and were thus immortalized. The Kingdom has been established and there is place in it for all faithful Christians who want to live forever.



THE COMFORTER

*And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you
another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever;*

John 14 : 16.

The Aramaic word *parakleta* means comforter or one who encourages or saves. The Aramaic word for Saviour is *paroka*. *Parakleta* is probably the participle of the verb *prak*, to save. The title of Saviour belongs to Christ, the Messiah.

According to the literal translation, the Comforter would seem to be another person, but this idea cannot be harmonized with Semitic thought concerning the unity of God. What Jesus probably meant was a reference to his own spirit or influence which would abide with his disciples forever. "If I do not go, the Spirit will not come" does not mean that Jesus had to go and force the Spirit to come. It means, "If I do not die I will have no influence over you and my spirit will not abide with you." That is to say, if Jesus had not gone to the cross, he would have gone to Galilee, grown old and died, leaving nothing behind. His movement would have died with him. It was his death on the cross which fired the hearts of his disciples with zeal. It was the spirit of Jesus which made the disciples travel over land and sea and even meet horrible deaths for his sake. Jesus left them but his spirit abided

with them in power and enabled them to see things spiritually. While he was with them in the flesh they reasoned materially. When Elijah was about to depart Elisha prayed for a double portion of his spirit to be given to him. (2 Kings 2 : 9). This was needed if Elisha was to continue his master's mission. So also was it with the disciples who needed the Spirit of Jesus to guide them as we likewise are guided.



ORPHANS

I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.

John 14 : 18.

The Eastern text reads, "I will not leave you orphans." Orphan asylums and other institutions for the poor are unknown. The destitute are left to roam in the streets and seek a livelihood by begging and servitude. When a man dies his family is immediately disorganized. His widow leaves for her father's home or seeks work. The children are left to the mercy of his relatives or on the streets.

Jesus was as a father to his disciples. They had trusted his counsel and judgment. They shared with him what he received from the people. They feared that his death would not only shatter their material hopes and happiness but would leave them orphans and destitute because he could not entrust them to any one else. Jesus promised to provide for them by entrusting them to the care of his Father. The Spirit was to help and guide them. After his death, the disciples were to be more popular and independent. They would stand before governors and kings and the Spirit of their Lord would tell them what to say. Men and women would sell their possessions and entrust the money to their care. They would not lack anything, just as they had lacked nothing when he was with them.



THE FATHER GREATER

Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I.

John 14 : 28.

All Semites honor their fathers regardless of their own position and influence. Jesus here refers to himself as the messenger of God. The Aramaic word *rab*, great, also means important, or famous; *nasha rabba* means a famous or important man.

In the east a messenger or representative generally declines an honor which belongs to his lord and master. He knows that when his lord is honored he shares in the honor, for what he receives depends on the kind of reception given him on behalf of his master.

Jesus was always humble. He called himself the "Son of man" which means a human being. He did not want people to honor him more than God his Father. When they asked him certain questions, his reply was "no one knows, not even the Son but the Father alone". In all circumstances he referred everything to God. This is the thought brought out by St. Paul, according to the eastern text, "Who was in the likeness of God and did not consider this resemblance as something to be grasped, but he emptied himself and took the appearance of a servant, and he became in the likeness of men". (Philippians 2 : 6-7).

Any claim which Jesus might have made to be greater than God or even to be God himself would certainly have caused misunderstanding even among his own followers. He always declared that he was in accord with God who is greater than he. This is in harmony with eastern thought, for a son reverences his father and considers him more important than himself.



THE TRUE VINE

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.
John 15 : 1.

In many parts of the east vines grow wild. They resemble the cultivated vines but their grapes are smaller and somewhat bitter. A good vineyard is noted for the grapes it produces. In the east a vine is a symbol of a family and of a church. The vine has its branches just as a family and church have their members. When good vineyards are neglected or abandoned, the fruit becomes poor, and the vine resembles one that is wild, uncultivated.

The Jewish race was God's vineyard. The prophets were the husbandmen but the Jews had for many centuries been without prophets and seers. They had lost their religious power and were like salt that had lost its savor.

Jesus was to prune this vineyard. He had to remove the dry branches and those which did not bear fruit. He was the true vine and those who believed in him were the branches which were to abide with him in order to bear fruit.



NOT SERVANTS BUT FRIENDS

Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.
John 15 : 15.

In Syria, Arabia and some other parts of the east the status of a servant is that of a slave. Disciples are also looked upon as servants of their teacher because they obey his commands. Warriors serve and die for their leader. The position of a lord and the respect shown him are much higher than in the west. Servants and disciples are timid and even afraid in the presence of their

master, and they serve him very humbly at home or when they travel. Some lords are fond of displaying this authority and power. They often rebuke and chasten their servants for no reason, and when they speak of them they call them servants. "My servant is not here." Kindly lords, when addressing their servants, call them "My son" and at times "My father". Jesus used the term friends, and once he called them "My sons".

As rivalry and intrigue are common, most masters hesitate to make their secrets known to their servants. Occasionally when a servant is faithful, his lord makes him overseer and confides all secrets to him just as Potiphar did to Joseph. (Genesis 39 : 4). Then again, teachers are jealous of their pupils and artisans of their apprentices. They hide their wisdom and secrets from them fearing that some day they may become their competitors. A teacher would dislike to see his disciples know more than himself, just as a lord would not wish to see his servant acquiring a higher position than himself. Jesus told his disciples everything they could grasp and he trained them to take his place when he was gone. They were not to be his competitors but his heirs.



TRUTH

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

John 16 : 7.

The Aramaic word for truth is *shrara* derived from *sharar* which means to sustain and affirm. In conversation, easterners often exaggerate so as to pay compliments to one another. At times what they say is in the form of a joke. During heated debates, they try to contradict or convince each other. The word truth is thus frequently used in order to carry conviction. "I tell you the truth" means what I am telling you is the truth and not a joke or an exaggeration, but something that I can

sustain. When such a remark is made there is no further argument.

The disciples had often heard Jesus speak in parables and figures of speech. When he spoke of his death, they did not take it seriously because easterners often speak of their death with no intention of dying soon. One hears people say, "I'll die for you," but this is a mere pleasantry and is never taken seriously. Jesus knew it was hard for his disciples to think of a suffering Messiah when they had been taught that the Messiah would be a great conqueror. He, therefore, wanted to impress on them that he had to die in order to accomplish his mission. Jesus used this word truth and its derivative "truly", whenever he wanted to emphasize the seriousness of his utterances.



HOLY SPIRIT REBUKING WORLD

*And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin,
and of righteousness, and of judgment:* John 16 : 8.

The Aramaic word *rokha*, spirit, also means expansion, and here it is used in the sense of effectiveness. Jesus relied on the Spirit to complete his mission. He expressly spoke of a hidden power which was to come and confirm his work.

There were many things which Jesus did not wish to explain or discuss, but he assured his disciples that they would be revealed to them in the near future. This was largely because his followers had not reached a point where they could see things spiritually; they understood things literally. They had to become spiritualized before the Spirit could commune with them. The Spirit was there but it was unknown to them. "If I do not go, the Spirit will not come". It means that if he did not die they would not see spiritually; the Spirit would not reveal things to them. Hitherto the disciples were relying on Jesus. After his death they were to be comforted by his Spirit and the influence he was to leave behind him.

The Spirit would rebuke the Jewish leaders and high priests of sin because they had rejected him and deliberately continued to live in moral bondage; of righteousness because they crucified him unjustly; of judgment because the princes of this world were already condemned for their injustice. The new kingdom was established and the new King inaugurated on the cross. The powers of men had come to an end. The political and religious leaders were to face final judgment, and the new era of justice and truth under the guidance of the Holy Spirit was to begin.



A MALE CHILD

A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.

John 16 : 21.

The birth of girls is not welcomed by easterners, and expectant mothers are always anxious to give birth to a male child. The news of a male birth often strengthens the relationship between a man and his wife. On the other hand, failure to give birth to a male child may result in separation and divorce. Women who have no male issues are often hated by their husbands.

When a woman gives birth to a child, and the child happens to be a girl, the news is kept from the mother especially if she is in serious condition. If it is a boy the mother is immediately informed and the news cheers her. She rejoices exceedingly because she gains favor in her husband's eyes, and she is no longer reproached by her neighbors for not having a male child. (Gen. 35 : 17; Jer. 20 : 15)

Male children are very important in Oriental families because men are always engaged in wars and revolutions, and women cannot inherit property. If a man should die leaving a wife and five girls, his estate goes to his nearest male relative and his family is left destitute. In some

Eastern countries the birth of a girl is greeted with sorrow and tears by the grief-stricken mother and her friends. Sometimes a black piece of cloth is hung on the door as a sign of mourning. The birth of a boy is regarded as a good omen and is welcomed with joy, merry-making and lavish banquets. Food is distributed to the poor and offerings made at shrines. The whole community joins in welcoming the new born son.

The crucifixion of Jesus was to cause distress and disappointment to his followers, but they were to be cheered by the good news of the resurrection, just as women are cheered by the birth of a son.



DESERTION

Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.
John 16 : 32.

When a leader surrenders himself willingly, his followers flee. His safety largely depends on their actions and behavior. Any resistance on their part would endanger his life. On the other hand, when a leader is seized by force, his followers fight to the last and lay down their lives for him.

Jesus had constantly predicted his arrest, humiliation and death at Jerusalem. He had willingly come to Jerusalem to die without resistance. His departure from his Messianic mission as a king was a puzzle to his disciples, some of them were armed and ready to lay down their lives for him. Some of them however, deserted him on his way to Jerusalem. Others were discouraged by Judas' revolt and the cold reception given him by the people of Jerusalem. They reluctantly and fearfully followed him to Gethsemane.

They were almost convinced their Lord would surrender and the only thing for them to do was flee and await

the outcome. They thought that he would probably be arrested, rebuked, chastised and released, as was often done to religious teachers who were condemned as heretics. None of them believed he would be sent to the cross. There had been rumors of his arrest but no serious charges to justify capital punishment. This is why they allowed the guards to seize him. Had they known he would be crucified, they would have fought to the finish. The high priests and soldiers understood the character of these warlike Galileans, and so they were well armed for the occasion.

Jesus' faith in his Father was stronger than that of his followers. He knew his Father would not forsake him, but would stand by him and vindicate his death. Mark 14 : 50.



UNITY IS ESSENTIAL

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. John 17 : 21.

The Aramaic word *be* means with me or by me. It is a term used of one who stands by another. Jesus did not mean that he was in his disciples and that they were in him, but that he would stand by them as his Father stood by him. He urged them to be of one accord just as he and his Father were of one accord. He prayed for them that "they may become perfected in one", and live in unity, so that the world may be convinced of his mission.

The success of Jesus' gospel depended on the harmony and unity of his disciples and their followers. He was leaving them in this world and everything was in their keeping. They were to be unified in order to withstand and triumph over the forces of opposition and evil. Discord would have disrupted the progress of the gospel and delayed its work, as it has actually done.



CONFRONTING THE ENEMY

As soon then as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. John 18 : 6.

When enemies confront each other in a sudden surprise, they immediately withdraw to hold positions. Some fall on the ground for protection. Others seek shelter behind stones and trees until they are ready to fight.

Judas had heard Jesus tell his disciples to buy swords. He undoubtedly took the saying literally and warned the priests and temple guards that his master and his Galilean disciples would offer resistance. Simon Peter carried a sword probably for cutting wood and meat and as a means of protection from wild animals.

The guards saw Peter ready with his sword. They feared that the other disciples would suddenly attack so they withdrew a short distance to arm and to protect themselves from an unexpected attack. This was why they fell to the ground, but when they heard Jesus rebuking Peter and commanding him to put up his sword, they immediately made the arrest.



THE HIGH PRIEST

And led him away to Annas first; for he was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year. John 18 : 13.

The Aaronic high priesthood was hereditary. Even though the high priest's jurisdiction was over religious matters, he also exerted a great influence in political and social affairs. This type of priesthood still exists among Assyrian Christians where patriarchs and bishops who do not marry are succeeded by their nephews.*

In the period of the Judges, Eli, the high priest, was

*The present patriarch of the Church is Mar Eshai Shimun XXI, Catholicos Patriarch of the East. He is the twenty-first succeeding patriarch of his family, a line of succession of over 600 years.

also ruler over Israel. He was succeeded as a ruler by Samuel, an office never held thereafter by a prophet.

During the reign of David when the kingdom was strongly established, priests had sole jurisdiction over religious affairs. In the reign of Solomon, the priesthood was highly organized and the office of high priest was important. This was largely due to the Temple and its rich revenues. Rivalry between kings and priests broke out from time to time. Jealousy and usurpation of power were shown by both sides. At times kings removed priests and appointed new ones. Sometimes priests accused rulers and started rebellions, as when Jehoiada overthrew Athaliah and proclaimed Josiah as King. (2 Kings 11 : 13-16).

The Aaronic priesthood continued unbroken until the Babylonian captivity, when the Temple was destroyed and Judah carried to Babylon in 486 B.C. It was again established by Ezra and Nehemiah. During the Greek conquest of Syria the priesthood was again disorganized. Simon, the founder of the Hasmonean dynasty became the ruler and high priest. His successors were also invested with the same authority. The welding of these two offices was necessary for the solidarity of the nation in order to withstand pagan invaders.

When the Romans conquered Palestine, they succeeded in weakening the Jewish ranks, by appointing rival high priests who had restricted temporal jurisdiction. These men were selected from candidates not because of moral character but because they favored the Roman government and did not oppose high taxation. Even though the Mosaic law required only one high priest for life, there were times when there were two rival high priests. Compare what happened in the Roman Church during what is known as the Babylonian captivity, when there were two rival popes. This office of high priest was often sold to the highest bidder and not given to the man of merit. The practice is still followed in Eastern countries which are ruled by Europeans. Religious authorities not in accord with government are deposed, and others appointed in their place.

During the time of Jesus the high priest had some temporal authority, but it was limited to Judaea. Had Jesus belonged to the province of Judaea, they would have stoned him, but he was a Galilean arrested in Jerusalem. The priests had no authority over Galilee which was under Herod, but the Roman procurator had authority over all territories ruled by native kings or princes. This was why the high priest had to go to Pilate for permission. Pilate was willing to let Jesus be tried by the Jews, but when he found he was from Galilee he immediately sent him to Herod. Matt. 26 : 3; Mark 14 : 63; Luke 22 : 50.



TO DIE INSTEAD OF THE PEOPLE

Now Caiaphas was he, which gave counsel to the Jews, that it was expedient that one man should die for the people.
John 18 : 14.

The Eastern text states, "It is better for one man to die instead of the people". The priests were afraid that Jesus' acts and words might cause sedition. His Messianic claims had already enlisted on his side the peasant population of Galilee and the neighboring country. They had tried to make him a king and there was fear of an uprising. The Romans had already crushed several revolutionary attempts in Galilee causing the massacre not only of the participants in the revolt but also of their sympathizers. Such political disturbances usually ended with the death of the leaders and the massacre of their supporters. The high priests and leaders of the Jews were anxious to avoid mishaps. Hence they decided it was better to put Jesus to death and lose one man, instead of exposing thousands to danger and death at the hands of the Romans and the chance of having their country taken away from them.

Jesus was put to death in order to avoid revolution and disaster to the Jewish people. But his death was intended by God to save Jew and Gentile from the power

of sin and Satan. It was to give humanity a new hope and death a new meaning, and bring peace to all mankind.



JESUS' DOCTRINES SUSPECTED

The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine. John 18 : 19.

Since Jesus was a Galilean, his teachings were suspected by the high priests and others in authority who belonged to Judaea. Though Galileans were members of the Jewish faith, the Jews regarded them as Gentiles. This was because Galilee was largely inhabited by Gentile Syrians and Assyrians. The Jews were jealous of their doctrines and traditions and afraid lest foreign teachings might corrupt Judaism. Many Jews were influenced by Roman civilization and the tendency among them was toward modernization. The priests were aware of this danger and suspicious of alien influences.

The high priest wanted to know concerning Jesus and his doctrines from eye witnesses and others who were familiar with his teachings. These teachings were doubtless misrepresented by his enemies, who confused their purpose and placed them in a false context. For instance, when he spoke of the destruction of the temple and its rebuilding in three days he referred to his body but the Jews thought that he meant the Temple in Jerusalem. His declaration that he was the Son of God was interpreted in a pagan manner. Pagan gods had wives, concubines and children. The high priest was convinced that Jesus was influenced by the pagan religions of Syria, which had many adherents in Galilee. It is evident that the high priests were ignorant of the actual teachings of Jesus. This was no doubt due to the fact that he had preached more frequently in Galilee than in Judaea. They naturally treated the whole matter at first as having only local significance and not of sufficient importance to command their attention.



STRUCK ON THE CHEEK

And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? John 18 : 22.

The eastern text reads "struck Jesus on his cheek". This is in accordance with eastern custom. When people fight they strike one another on the cheek. When a man is punished for a minor offence he is struck on his cheek. In the same way pupils are punished by their teachers and soldiers by their officers. In the case of grievous offences the victim is punished by scourging on the back. This guard was standing by Jesus when he replied to the high priest.



DEFILED IN PASSOVER WEEK

Then led they Jesus from Caiaphas unto the hall of judgment; and it was early; and they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover. John 18 : 28.

It is an established custom among Eastern Christians not to touch any unclean thing or to converse with a heretic soon after they have taken the Holy Communion. Some strict Assyrian Christians would not talk with a Mohammedan or a Jew during Holy Week. Mohammedans likewise have their restrictions. In case one is touched even by accident he has to make a new ablution and prayer and begin all over again.

The Passover was eaten on Thursday, but to the Jews the whole week was holy, just as Holy Week is so regarded by Christians. The Jews would not enter the Praetorium for fear of being touched by Pilate's Gentile servants. On such occasions the Jews generally remained exclusively at home. But this was an emergency and they had to take Jesus to Pilate to have him crucified before Saturday. And yet at the same time they had to take

precautions and not be defiled by touching any Gentiles, even accidentally.



CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Then said Pilate unto them, Take ye him, and judge him according to your law. The Jews therefore said unto him, It is not lawful for us to put any man to death:

John 18 : 31.

Crucifixion as a capital punishment was a Roman and not a Jewish custom. The Jews stoned their victim and then hung the dead body on a tree to expose the crime. (Lev. 23 : 34; 24 : 2, 14). Even under the Romans the Jews had some authority to inflict capital punishment on men convicted of blasphemy or heresy, as seen in the case of Stephen (Acts 7 : 59). This is why Pilate reminded them of their privilege to judge a prisoner according to their own law. At first the charge against Jesus was religious, but this was outside the sphere of the Roman governor who had jurisdiction only over political matters. They then shifted the charge from blasphemy against their god to treason against Caesar.

Crucifixion was inflicted by the Romans chiefly on their Gentile subjects. Jesus was a Galilean, and he therefore expected to die on the cross instead of by stoning.



THE PRAETORIUM

Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews?

John 18 : 33.

Praetorium is the Latin name for the residence of Roman generals. This name was also given to the tent where the general lived during campaigns. The newly conquered countries and turbulent regions were ruled by Roman generals who were appointed procurators by the

emperor. Their chief functions were to collect revenues, suppress rebellions and administer justice. Other and lesser duties were assigned to native kings and princes, who however ruled under the authority of the governor general appointed directly by the emperor.

Cases of high treason, which required the death penalty, were always referred to the procurator who decided them himself or referred them to the governor general who resided in Antioch the capital of Syria. Roman citizens had the privilege to appeal even to the emperor who was the supreme ruler, as was done by St. Paul who was a Roman citizen, and who was entitled to be tried before Caesar. (Acts 25 : 11).

Pilate was procurator over Judaea, whose capital was Jerusalem. Galilee and other regions were under other Roman governors, who were responsible to the governor general.

Pilate's palace is now an Armenian monastery. The buildings and court yards resemble old Turkish and Roman palaces. The palace has a large courtyard in the center and is surrounded by buildings with open porches. Some of these buildings were doubtless occupied by the Governor's staff, and other buildings were for receptions and divans.



THOU SAYEST

Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him, Art thou the King of the Jews?

Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? John 18 : 33, 34.

The Aramaic *at amarat* means, "you say that." That is, "You say that I am a king or others have told you falsely concerning me. But I have not said it. If I were a king my servants would have fought for me and I would not have been delivered into the hands of the Jews. The Jews are demanding my life. They are waiting outside

with knives and staves. How can I be a king to these people? To this end I was born and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth, and be a sufferer for the sake of truth." The Aramaic word for yes is *aen* and for no it is *la*. Jesus used neither of these words and placed the responsibility for decision upon the governor.

The answer was so emphatic in its denial of a political kingdom that Pilate immediately realized that the charge made against Jesus was false. The man who was standing before him did not possess the characteristics and demeanor of an earthly king or of one who aspired to such a place. His own people and the high priests had delivered him and their charges about taxation and rebellion were framed.

Pilate, therefore, sought to release him. He saw that the whole affair was a religious controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees and priests, and had nothing to do with political claims touching the government. That is why Pilate asked the Jews to judge him in their own way. The government had no interest in matters of religion.



WHAT IS THIS TRUTH?

Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all. John 18 : 38.

Jesus in his answer to Pilate's question "Art thou a king then," pointed out that he was not an earthly king but had come to suffer on the cross for the sake of the truth concerning the kingdom of heaven, of which he is the king. Pilate then understood that Jesus had no political aspirations, and that the accusations against him were based on religious prejudices. "What is this truth," as the Eastern text renders it, means what is your religious belief and what do you represent. The governor was aware of the hostile rivalries between the Jewish

sects of the Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes. He did not wait for an answer because he knew a great deal about Jewish theology. There was no need to examine Jesus' theological views. These were matters for the Jews to settle among themselves and not for the Roman procurator. Therefore when he went out of the palace, he told the Jews, "I have examined him and find no fault in him."



JESUS SCOURGED

Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him.

John 19 : 1.

The Aramaic reads "had him scourged." This is more in accordance with the custom. High government officials never punish people themselves. They give orders to soldiers or servants to inflict the punishment. Some officials refuse even to be present when the victim is whipped. This was a soldier's job, and not that of a governor. It would be a disgrace for one of high position even to smite a criminal in public. Some would be contaminated by touching a condemned person.



GABBATHA

When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha.

John 19 : 13.

The word *gab-batha* is an Aramaic compound noun. *Gab* means side, *betha* or *batha* means, house. *Gab-batha* means on the side of the house.

Nearly every oriental house has a place at its entrance where people sit down. It is about four feet high and three feet wide and constructed of large stones. This is where

Eli was seated when he fell down on receiving the bad news about the capture of the Ark. (I Sam. 4 : 18). This is where political and religious matters are discussed and important judgments pronounced. On important occasions gatherings of people are addressed from this place, by speakers who sit on the gab-batha as a platform. At the homes of the rich and of government officials this place is also used as a resting place by servants and soldiers.

This was the last appearance of Pilate in defence of Jesus. The Jews usually entered the palace and the judgment hall, but on this occasion the crowd had increased and become excited, and there was danger of tumult and violence. The governor had already been accused of being lenient towards the man whom the high priests had condemned. It would have been unsafe for Pilate and his household to allow the frenzied mob to enter the palace. He therefore came out and used the Gab-batha as a platform to address the large crowd which had gathered and to make his final appeal to them.



THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

This title then read many of the Jews: for the place where Jesus was crucified was nigh to the city: and it was written in Hebrew, and Greek, and Latin. John 19 : 20.

Hebrew here means Aramaic, the language of the Hebrew people. Hebrew is the name of the race and not the language.

The Jews spoke Aramaic after their return from Babylon. Hebrew was primarily derived from Aramaic. The two languages are so alike one can hardly make distinctions. Abraham was an Assyrian. Jacob's children were born in Assyria and later sojourned in Egypt and Palestine. The people of Palestine called them Hebrews which means, those who crossed over the river. Hebrew ceased to be the spoken language from 450 B. C. to the ninth

century A. D. Aramaic was the literary and colloquial language of the Jewish people. Hebrew remained a classical language and was only read by rabbis and during services in the synagogue when it was interpreted into Aramaic. Even today Aramaic prayers are used in the Jewish prayer book.

. . . Josephus considers Aramaic so thoroughly identical with Hebrew that he quotes Aramaic words as Hebrew ("Ant." iii. 10, section 6), and describes the language in which Titus' proposals to the Jerusalemites were made (which certainly were in Aramaic) as Hebrew ("B. J." vi. 2, section 1). It was in Aramaic that Josephus had written his book on the "Jewish War", as he himself informs us in the introduction, before he wrote it in Greek. . . .*

. . . In Hebrew philology, Aramaic was especially useful in the explanation of Hebrew words in the Bible; and it served as the foundation for a comparative philology of the Semitic languages inaugurated by Judah ibn Koreish and Saadia . . .*

. . . For more than a thousand years Aramaic remained the vernacular of Israel, until the conquests of the Arabs produced another linguistic change, as a sequel of which a third Semitic language became the popular tongue for a large portion of the Jewish race, and the vehicle of their thought. The spread of Arabian supremacy over the whole country formerly dominated by the Aramaic tongue produced with extraordinary rapidity and completeness an Arabizing of both the Christian and Jewish populations of western Asia, who had hitherto spoken Aramaic (Syriac) . . .*

The inscriptions were written on a stone tablet and placed above the cross. Greek was used because the Alexandrian Jews who had come for the Passover could not read Aramaic. In 300 B. C. the Bible was translated into Greek because the Jews in Egypt could not understand Aramaic. Latin was used because it was the official language of the Roman Empire. Some of the soldiers and other Romans could not read either Aramaic or Greek. Aramaic was the language of the common people.

The map in the front of the book shows the countries where Aramaic language is used today.

*From "The Jewish Encyclopedia," Vol. 2, published by Funk and Wagnalls Co., New York and London, by special permission.



THE SEAMLESS ROBE

Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout.

They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did. John 19 : 23, 24.

When a dispute arises over certain articles between various parties, the decision is made by throwing lots. This is chiefly done when a special article of value and beauty is desired by everyone present and it cannot be divided into parts without damaging it.

If several articles are to be disposed of they are placed in separate piles. Stones of different colors and sizes are then chosen and each person selects his own stone. These stones are then dropped over the articles by a disinterested person and each man has to take the article or articles over which his stone falls. In case there is a single article to be disposed of, like the seamless robe of Jesus, four stones are selected and one of them is cast over the article. The person to whom the stone belongs becomes the possessor of the article.

This robe was probably woven by Mary or presented to Jesus by one of his devoted friends. Eastern women often weave special garments for their loved ones as a token of affection. Such garments are used only on special occasions like weddings or the passover festival.



FRIDAY

The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the sabbath day, (for that sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. John 19 : 31.

The eastern text reads "because it was Friday" instead of "preparation day." The Passover was eaten on Thursday. The preparation day was the day before, which would be Wednesday when all preparation for the Passover was completed. Friday was the day after the Passover, when the crucifixion took place.

Jesus and his disciples ate the Passover on Thursday evening, which was the day when every Jew ate it.

There is a misunderstanding about the actual day of the Passover which fell on Thursday, the fourteenth of Nisan. Some hold that Jesus ate the Passover a day earlier. This is improbable for Jesus definitely planned for the Passover and ate it with his disciples. (Matthew 27 : 17-19). There was no reason to depart from this historic custom. He was thus crucified on Friday and rose on Sunday.

THE PREPARATION DAY

The Eastern text reads "because it was Friday"; that is to say, late Friday evening. The Sabbath was approaching. The Passover was eaten on Thursday and the preparation day was the day before the Passover and not after it.

Easterners count the day from sunrise to sunset. The Jews did not want to see the men alive on their crosses on the Sabbath day, because they could not then act as a guard. They asked the governor to have their legs broken so as to be sure that they were dead because the Sabbath day approached and they wanted to leave the place.

This was merely an excuse. Jesus and the two malefactors were crucified by Romans and their death had nothing to do with the Jewish Sabbath. Even if they had

remained alive on their crosses on the Sabbath, it would not have been broken because the Romans were not Jews. There was something more than the Sabbath behind the demand that their legs be broken. The Jews wanted to be sure that Jesus was dead before they left the scene of the crucifixion. They were afraid that after they were gone, the soldiers might get tired of watching and abandon the bodies before the victims were dead.

Jesus might then be taken away alive, or his body might be lowered, supposing him to be dead, and his disciples might take him and heal his wounds. This has happened in many countries. Men, shot by a firing squad and given up for dead, have often recovered or escaped the bullets. Others who were given up for dead, have been taken away by relatives and healed. The Jews wanted to see that Jesus' legs were broken to prevent this mistake. They did not want to take any chances. But Jesus had died long before. In order to convince the public, the soldiers pierced him with a spear. This was to relieve them of any blame or of the charge of bribery and of leniency toward Jesus.



A NEW HEWN TOMB

Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid.

John 19 : 41.

Easterners bury their dead shortly after death. If a man should die in the morning he is buried at noon, and if he die late in the afternoon he is buried in the evening. A dead body is seldom kept until the next day, except when death occurs at night. The body is buried quickly because easterners consider a corpse unclean. Also, there are no undertakers and no means of preserving the body. The climate causes early decay and it is contrary to religious belief and custom to leave a dead body in the house, where many families live under the same roof. In emergencies the dead are taken to the church.

Jesus died late on Friday. It was against the Jewish law to bury him on the Sabbath day which begins on Friday evening. The body was therefore temporarily laid in a nearby tomb, hewn in a rock, to be removed on Sunday and buried permanently. Caves and hewn tombs are very abundant in Palestine. These are the only places to which a dead man could be removed. This applies particularly to the dead bodies of slain robbers and criminals who are not given a decent burial and could not be brought into the city.



TOUCH ME NOT

Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God. John 20 : 17.

The Eastern text reads, "Do not come near me." The Aramaic word *krav* means to come near and to touch, but in this instance the rendering "come near" is more correct. Eastern women never touch men in public. During conversation they are not supposed to be close to the men. A violation of this custom is often misunderstood and looked upon with suspicion. There are exceptions. When a man returns from a long journey or when a person, given up for dead, is found to be alive, or when the lost return, the women then hasten to embrace and kiss such individuals whether they are relatives or neighbors.

Jesus rose from the dead early in the morning. When Mary saw him, there were other people passing by or at work. She drew near to embrace and kiss him as one who was given up for dead but is alive. Such an act would certainly have aroused the suspicions of those around who would have given it a wrong and immoral interpretation. They knew nothing of the circumstances about Jesus' death and resurrection.



HE BREATHED ON THEM

And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost. John 20 : 22.

This is an Aramaic idiom commonly used even today, and means he gave them courage. The Aramaic word *npakh* means, to blow into. It is said the prophets were blown into by the Holy Spirit so that they were able to speak for God. An instrument is blown into to make music. The prophets and the disciples were God's instruments. They were to sing and sound the note of the new kingdom.

"He breathed on them" means he encouraged them to carry on the mission. After the crucifixion, the disciples were discouraged. Their Messianic hopes and aspirations were shattered. Their Lord had met the death of a malefactor. They thought their careers had come to an end and so they went back to Galilee and fishing. Jesus then appeared and conversed with them, reminding them the Son of Man had to die and rise again in order that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, and that his death was a victory. He impressed on them he was alive and would be with them always. These encouraging words and promises helped the disciples to be courageous. Once again they took up the cross and followed him.



DOUBTFUL THOMAS

The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. John 20 : 25.

Easterners become excited over cheerful, sad or unexpected news and are bewildered. "I cannot believe you" they say. When lost persons are found, they say "I cannot believe it. It must be a false vision." Such state-

ments are not always due to positive doubt but to an excess of joy creating the feeling that it is too good to be true. Also, false rumors are common and good news is often exaggerated.

Thomas was cautious in believing the news of the Risen Lord. He had fled from Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. When he heard the sad news of the crucifixion, to him everything was over. His master had been slain by the Jews, dead and buried like other prophets. Suddenly he heard the news of the resurrection and finally Jesus himself stood before him.

These events followed in such quick succession he was overwhelmed and did not know what to make of it. When he saw Jesus, at first he thought it was a false vision, then doubts crept into his mind and he thought probably his Lord was not slain and the news concerning his death had been false, as often happens. Men are frequently reported killed but return home safe. Jesus probably knew Thomas thought he had not been crucified but, as on other occasions, he had escaped from his enemies. Jesus bade Thomas come forward to touch his feet and hands, and see the wounds for himself so that he might believe he had been crucified and was risen again.



PETER'S LOYALTY TESTED

So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. John 21 : 15.

The Aramaic word *halen* means "these," and here it refers to things and not to disciples. If Jesus had meant disciples, then this word would have been inserted in the sentence and it would have read *talmidey halen*, these disciples. It is not likely Jesus would have asked Peter such a question for he knew Peter loved him more than he loved the other disciples. In the east every disciple loves his master more than his fellows. Peter had

already shown his love by following Jesus to the courtyard of Caiaphas while the other disciples left him at the garden and fled. There is no doubt Peter loved his master more than the other disciples did and there is no doubt Peter loved his master more than he loved his fellow disciples.

After the crucifixion, most of the disciples went to Galilee where they resumed their business of fishing. To leave their commissions and return to their old occupations may appear like a hasty act, but the fact is the master had left them no money. They had eaten their last meal at the Passover with their Lord. Where could they get their next meal? They had lived on Jesus' popularity and shared the hospitality extended to him. Now that their Lord was taken away from them, they had either to beg or return to their former occupations. They could not beg in Jerusalem without being exposed to danger so they went to Galilee impelled by hunger.

Jesus found them fishing and told them to cast their nets at a particular spot. They did so and made a large catch. It was while they were sorting the fish that Jesus said, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me more than these?" which means more than material things. Jesus wished to test Peter to see whether he would give up the business of a fisherman to take up his mission.

Peter's Messianic hope had been shattered by the cross. Jesus had to win him again through his resurrection. When Peter answered "Yea, Lord," Jesus commanded him to feed his sheep and his lambs. This was in accordance with Jesus' teachings. Men were asked to leave everything and follow him. This was the second call to Peter but it was of the greatest importance. Peter was to become the chief shepherd of the flock which Jesus was leaving behind.

PETER'S COMMISSION

The eastern text reads "Feed my male lambs." The sixteenth verse reads "Feed my sheep" and the seventeenth, "Feed my female lambs." This is in accordance

with the eastern custom, where three different flocks consist respectively of sheep and goats for milking, male lambs and rams, and female lambs. These flocks are kept separate during the summer months in the milking season. Sheep are raised not for meat as in other countries but for milk, cheese and allied products on which the people live.

The three flocks are in charge of several shepherds but they are all under a head-shepherd, whose advice is sought in matters of grazing, water and the protection of the sheep. He is the one who searches for new pastures and orders the sheep to a new location.

Jesus gave Peter charge of three flocks—sheep, male lambs and female lambs. They were symbolical of the Jews, Galileans and pagans. His disciples were soon to shepherd all races. Peter was to be their leader and counsellor in Jerusalem.



BASKETS

When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.

Therefore they gathered them together, and filled twelve baskets with the fragments of the five barley loaves, which remained over and above unto them that had eaten.

John 6 : 12, 13.

Bread baskets were woven from straw or willow. They were about twelve inches in diameter and four inches deep. The people carried their food supplies and gifts in them. Baskets as bread containers were also used for out-ings. The crumbs were gathered because bread is scarce and never wasted and it is considered sacred. It is always eaten. It is either given to the poor or thrown to the dogs.

It is an ancient Eastern custom, which is still practiced today, when people visit a healer or a prophet, baskets full of specially baked bread, food-stuffs and other gifts are brought to him as an offering. No one would visit a holy man or a shrine without taking an offering. This is

what the Eastern people give to men of God and offer at shrines in a land where money is scarce.

Bread is baked very thin and round, about twelve to fifteen inches in diameter. At times fish and cheese are wrapped in it. Fish are baked and left to cool before they are eaten. Fish taken on a journey lasts several days without losing freshness. Cheese and other articles keep much longer and are carried on longer journeys. Jesus and his disciples carried bread when traveling. On one occasion, his disciples told him that they had forgotten to take bread with them. Mark 8: 14. When Gideon visited the angel of the Lord, he prepared a kid and unleavened bread and carried them in a basket to him. Judges 6: 18, 19. When Saul was searching for his father's asses, he told his servant that they had no bread left to take as an offering to Samuel in order to consult him about the asses. So they took the coin which was in the possession of the servant. 1 Samuel 9: 7, 8. When Abijah, the son of King Jeroboam, fell sick, the king told his wife to visit Ahijah, the prophet, who was a healer and he instructed her to take a gift of ten loaves of bread, cakes and honey. Cakes are bread baked with butter and milk. 1 Kings 14: 3. In 2 Kings 4: 42, we read, "There came a man from Baal-shalisha, and brought the man of God bread of the first fruits, twenty loaves of barley, and full ears of corn." When David fled from Absalom, Ziba brought him two hundred loaves of bread. 2 Sam. 16: 1. Naaman, the Syrian general, brought abundant gifts to the prophet Elisha when he healed him of leprosy. 2 Kings 5: 15, 16. When Ben-hadad, king of Syria, was sick, he sent Hazall with forty camels laden with presents to inquire of Elisha. 2 Kings 8: 8, 9.

Jesus fed the crowd on the mountain back of Tiberias. They had gathered from all the surrounding country, bringing with them the sick, the lame, the blind and the insane. They had also brought with them baskets containing food.

Jesus blessed the bread and fishes. His divine blessing and his infinite knowledge of God's power increased the supply of bread and fish so that the hungry were fed and

satisfied and twelve empty baskets were filled with fragments.

Jesus had infinite knowledge of God's wisdom and he was always able to face any situation and meet any need. He had raised the dead and opened the eyes of the blind. Jesus wanted the hungry crowd fed and he had faith his prayers would be granted and all would be satisfied.



THE JEWS

After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him.

John 7 : 1.

The name of the race is Hebrew. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob could not have been Jews for the term Jew is derived from Judah and Judah was a son of Jacob.

The Hebrews did not call themselves Jews in patriarchal days, or when they were in Egypt, or during the conquest of Palestine. Easterners are known by their religion rather than by their race. Until the time of the Babylonian captivity, 586 B.C., the Jews were known as Hebrews or Israelites. The people of Judea were called the tribe of Judah. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity of the tribe of Judah and Benjamin, political Israel was completely destroyed by the Assyrians and the Chaldeans and the remnants of the tribes were identified by their religion. They were called Jews because the temple which was the national shrine and the center of worship was in Judea. After the restoration and the rebuilding of the second temple, the term Jews was frequently used and gradually replaced the name of the race, Hebrew.

During the time of Jesus, there was quite a difference between the Jews, Samaritans and Galileans. The latter were members of the Jewish religion but their ancestors were the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians and other mixed races which the Assyrian King, Shalmaneser, had settled in Galilee. 2 Kings 17: 24. They adhered to their own ancient customs and traditions but they worshipped

the God of Israel. The Jews had no social dealings with the Samaritans and they despised the Galileans because they did not strictly adhere to the traditions of the Jewish elders, such as washing of hands before meals, fasting, and the strict observance of the Sabbath. Jesus was largely attacked on these grounds. He was generally known as a Galilean. John 7: 41, 52. On one occasion, he was wrongly called a Samaritan. John 9: 48. Galileans were closer in their religious affiliation to the Jews than Samaritans. All of Jesus' disciples, with the exception of Judas Iscariot who was of Judea, were Galileans.



RAISING OF LAZARUS

*These things said he: and after that he saith unto them,
Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake
him out of sleep.* John 11: 11.

"He sleeps" is an Aramaic and Hebrew term which means, "He is dead." When a king, prince or a holy man dies, it is said, "He sleeps with his fathers." 1 Kings 2: 10. Uneducated and simple folks who converse in the vernacular tongue often misunderstand the meaning of this saying. They take it literally just as the disciples took it literally when Jesus said, "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." This is because the Aramaic word *SHAKHIV* means asleep or lying down or dead. Jesus often used this term when speaking of people who had passed away. When he entered the house of Jairus, Jesus told the people not to weep. "The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth." Mark 5: 39. In this case, Jesus used a more colloquial Aramaic word *DAMKHA YE* which means "she is sleeping."

When Jesus heard of the sickness of Lazarus, he said "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby." John 11: 4. Jesus knew Lazarus was sick but he also knew that he was able to raise him. "This sickness is not unto death" means that was not a hopeless case. In the East,

healers and doctors often minimize the seriousness of sickness and wounds in order to encourage the patient and cheer his relatives and friends. Even when the sick person is at the point of death, they remark, "Tomorrow he will be all right and working."

Jesus knew death had no power over those who have a deep and spiritual understanding of the infinite power of God. He once said, "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God." Luke 9: 27. Then again, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul." Matt. 10: 28.

Eastern physicians and healers are never hurried when summoned to visit a sick person. They take time. It often happens they arrive two or three days late, partly due to difficult travel and partly due to personal affairs which they cannot at once leave. Also, Eastern physicians are not punctual in their engagements and visits neither are they concerned about their reputation. In the East, doctors and healers are not paid for their work. They are given gifts as a thank offering when the sick person is healed. If the patient dies, they say, "Let him rest in peace. God gave him and God took him away. Blessed be his name." Even though Jesus knew Lazarus was dead, he did not believe in the finality of death because he was aware of the power of God which can destroy the sting of death and break the gates of sheol. Had he believed that death was an end, he would not have gone to Lazarus for his visit would have been in vain and Lazarus' sisters would probably have been angry as Easterners generally are when a doctor is late and the patient dies. To Jesus, death was nothing more than a sleep. "I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." John 11: 25.

Lazarus was buried in a cave because caves are abundant in Palestine and are generally used for tombs. In the East, the dead are buried the same day they die and their bodies are never disturbed. Undertakers are unknown and the dead are not embalmed. Burying is the responsibility of the town. The dead are wrapped in a

single white garment. The head is covered with another piece. The dead are laid as though they were sleeping.

When Jesus came to the tomb, he asked that the stone be removed. Then, when he had prayed, he cried with a loud voice "Lazarus come forth!"

This was one of the greatest miracles which Jesus performed. Lazarus was dead four days and he was raised in the presence of both his friends and his enemies. It was after the raising of Lazarus that the Pharisees and priests began to be aware of Jesus' work, its importance, and its danger to their traditions and theologies.

Eastern tradition says Lazarus became first Bishop of Cyprus.



GREATER WORKS SHALL HE DO

Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.

John 14 : 12.

In Palestine and Syria, an artist always assures his apprentice that some day he will surpass him in his skill and workmanship. This is also true of a good teacher. The student, though lacking confidence and experience, hopes that some day he will be as skilled as his master or even better. The apprentice learns his master's trade and its secrets and at the same time he discovers new methods and tools which were unknown to his master. The master is aware of future discoveries and progress in his trade and he has absolute confidence in the success of his faithful apprentices.

Jesus' disciples were students learning the secrets of the new gospel, to preach and to heal. They were astonished at the cures and miracles their Master performed. They were eager to do these things themselves. They often wondered if they would ever have the secret of this power and wisdom. They had some faith but little confi-

dence and experience. At times, they failed to heal the sick who were brought to them.

Jesus encouraged them and assured them of utmost success, stating that they and those who would follow them would do even greater things. Jesus, in his preaching and debates, had silenced the rabbis of Galilee and Judea. In healing, he had surpassed the prophets, doctors and healers of all times. His disciples stood before governors and kings and silenced the high priests. They restored the insane, cleansed the lepers, raised the dead and converted more people than Jesus had. Jesus had sown the seed in Galilee and Judea and his disciples carried on in the larger and more powerful centers and churches in Jerusalem, Syria, Mesopotamia and Rome.

Greater miracles have been done by men of God through the teaching of Jesus.



BURIED WITH GARMENTS

And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.

John 20 : 7.

The dead are bathed, then clothed in a white burial shroud woven all in one piece. Both bathing and the white garment are symbolical of immortality and resurrection. The dead are thus prepared for the resurrection day when they will be met by angels, clothed in white. Moreover, bathing and white burial apparel are symbolical of purity and preparedness for the future life. The dead must be clothed when they arise on the last day. Easterners never bury their dead wearing the ordinary clothes or garments worn during life. The burial shroud must be a new white garment of cotton or linen.

Bandits, criminals and persons publicly put to death, are not usually given these religious burial rites which Easterners consider sacred. They are buried in the garments which the soldiers reject as worthless and leave on them. Provincial soldiers are entrusted with these tasks.

They are seldom paid for their services and they provide their own clothes. They obtain what they can from the people, especially from prisoners who are under their charge.

When a person is put to death, most of his valuable outer garments and other belongings are the property of the soldiers and prison guards. At times, the guards do not wait. So that others cannot take them, the prisoner is stripped and relieved of the best of his outer garments before he is bound in chains.

Jesus had many friends and admirers. They had given him garments as tokens of appreciation. So Jesus had a number of good outer garments. Noblemen and holy men wore more garments than the ordinary person, many robes and many shirts at a time.

When Jesus was crucified, his garments were divided among the soldiers. Undergarments, which consisted of a light cloak and several shirts, were not taken. In the case of a man crucified publicly, it is improper to strip him of all his garments. A portion of Jesus' garments were left on him when he was crucified. There were many women and children standing near the cross. The chief priests and elders who were present would have resented the crucifixion of a person without garments.

The burial of Jesus was rather hasty because of fear and lack of time. The Sabbath was approaching and the dead must be buried before the end of the day. Jesus' body was lowered from the cross and wrapped in a white burial garment. His undergarments were not removed and his body was neither washed nor embalmed. Thus when Jesus arose from the tomb, the burial garment having been laid aside, he appeared to the disciples as they had last seen him.

In order to accomplish this work, I had to think in both Aramaic, my mother tongue, and English, my adopted tongue.

I pray God to thank him for preserving my people and their ancient language to the present day. I pray God this work will help all Christians to a better understanding of the Gospel message. In these days when Christianity is challenged and Christian unity is needed, I pray God denominational and creedal differences will be overlooked. I pray God we may unite in one accord for the common purpose of understanding Jesus Christ who is the cornerstone of our Christian faith.

This work is completed March 10th in the year of our Lord 1936 which is the fourth year of the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt of the blessed country of the United States of America in which citizenship I share with gratitude and appreciation.

May God, the Father, make our souls worthy of the glorious resurrection and partakers of the heavenly kingdom, through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, Amen.

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